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MY RECOLLECTIONS

OF

LORD BYRON;

AND

THOSE OF EYE-WITNESSES OF HIS LIFE.

"The long promised work of the
COUNTESS GUICCIOLI."—
Athenæum.

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MY RECOLLECTIONS, &c.

CHAPTER I.

THE CONSTANCY OF LORD BYRON.

Among Lord Byron's moral virtues, may we count that of constancy? Men in general, not finding this virtue in their own lives, refuse to believe in its existence among those who, in exception to the common rule, do possess it. They must be forced to this act of justice as to many others. This is comprehensible; constancy is so rare!

"I less easily believe constancy in men than anything else," says Montaigne, "and nothing more easily than inconstancy."

Besides the difficulties common to every one, Lord Byron had also to fight against those difficulties peculiar to his sensitive nature and his vast intelligence.

"The largest minds," says Bacon, "are the least constant, because they find reasons for deliberating, where others only see occasion for acting."

But if these difficulties overcame Lord Bacon's constancy, could they have the same power over Lord Byron, who was indeed his equal in mind, but

his opposite in conduct and strength of soul? There are three sorts of constancy: that of affection, which has its source in goodness of heart; that of taste, flowing from beauty of soul; that of idea, derived from rectitude of intelligence.

Did Lord Byron possess the whole of these, or only a part? As this may be chiefly proved, not from writings or words, but by conduct, let us ask the question of those who knew him personally and at all periods of his life.

Was he constant in his ideas? Moore, speaking of Lord Byron's intellectual faculties, of his variableness, of which he makes too much, for the reasons I have mentioned,* and of the danger to which it exposed his consistency and oneness of character, says:—

"The consciousness, indeed, of his own natural tendency to yield thus to every chance impression, and change with every passing impulse, was not only for ever present to his mind, but, aware as he was of the suspicion of weakness attached by the world to any retractation or abandonment of long professed opinions, had the effect of keeping him in that general line of consistency, on certain great subjects, which, notwithstanding occasional fluctuations and contradictions as to the details of these very subjects, he continued to preserve throughout life. A passage from one of his manuscripts will show how sagaciously he saw the necessity of guarding himself against his own instability in this respect:—'The world,' he says, 'visits change of politics or change of religion with a more severe censure than a mere

* See chapter on 'Mobility.'

difference of opinion would appear to me to deserve. But there must be some reason for this feeling, and I think it is that this departure from the earliest instilled ideas of our childhood, and from the line of conduct chosen by us when we first enter into public life, have been seen to have more mischievous results for society, and to prove more weakness of mind than other actions, in themselves more immoral.'"

"To superficial observers," says the Hon. Col. Stanhope, "his conduct might appear uncertain; and that was the case sometimes, but only *up to a certain point.* His genius was limitless and versatile, and in conversation he passed boldly from grave to gay, from light to serious topics; but nevertheless, *upon the whole and in reality*, no man was more constant, I might almost say *more obstinate*, than Lord Byron *in the pursuit of great objects.* For instance, in religion and in politics, he seemed as firm as a rock, though, like a rock, he was sometimes subject to great shocks, to the convulsions of nature in commotion. What I affirm is, that Lord Byron had very fixed opinions on important matters. It is not from the opinion he wished to give of himself, nor from what he allowed to escape his lips, that I could have drawn this conclusion; for, in conversing with me on politics or religion, and passing capriciously over this latter subject, sometimes laughing and making strings of jests, he would say for instance, '*the more I think the more I doubt—I am a thorough sceptic;*' but I find these words contradicted in *all his actions, and in all his sentiments seriously expressed from childhood to death.* And I opine that although occasionally he may have appeared changeable, still he always came back to

certain fixed ideas in his mind; that he always entertained a constant attachment to liberty, according to his notions of liberty; and that, although not orthodox in religion, he *firmly believed* in the existence of a God. It is then equally false to represent him as an atheist or as an orthodox Christian. Lord Byron was, as he often told me, *a thorough deist.*"*

It would be easy to prove in a thousand ways that, despite the danger of inconstancy resulting from his great sensibility, imagination, and intellect, no one, more than Lord Byron, steadily and firmly adhered *through life* in his actions to the principles which *constitute the man of honour.* Chances, caprices, inequalities of temper, which are to sensitive natures what bubbles are on a lake, all disappeared when these great principles required to be acted upon; and the effects even of his well-nigh inexhaustible benevolence were checked, if he had to struggle against his principles. We find in his memoranda, 1813:— "I like George Byron" (his cousin, the present lord); "I like him much more than one generally does one's heirs. He is a fine fellow. I would do anything to see him advance in his career as a sailor; *anything, except apostatise!*" (Lord Byron was a *Whig*, and his cousin a *Tory.*)

As it is impossible to quote everything, I will only say that his passion for firmness and constancy in the principles of honour, went so far as to inspire him with repugnance for those characters lacking the firmness and oneness of action which he considered it a sacred duty to practise. It is even to this sentiment that must be attributed certain antipathies

* Stanhope, Parry, 235.

which he expressed, sometimes by words and sometimes by silence, and which have been laid to totally different, and quite impossible motives. For instance, his silence concerning Chateaubriand, expressive of his little sympathy for the individual (a silence so much resented by this proud vindictive poet, and for which he revenged himself in different ways), was not caused solely by the radical antagonism existing between their two natures. Assuredly, the literary affectation, the want of sincerity, the theatrical and declamatory nature of Chateaubriand's soul, who was positively ill with insatiable pride, innate and incurable ennui, all this could little assimilate with the simplicity, sincerity, passionate tenderness and devotion of Lord Byron. But his repugnance was especially directed against the sceptic, who made himself the champion of catholicism, and the liberal who upheld the divine right of kings.*

A few days before Lord Byron set out for his last journey to Greece, a young man (M. Coullmann) arrived at Genoa, bringing him the admiring homage of many celebrated men in France, who sent him their respective works. Among the number were Delavigne and Lamartine. Chateaubriand, of course, was conspicuous by his absence: but an anecdote Coullmann related, of what had just occurred at Turin, greatly amused Lord Byron. Chateaubriand had lately been presented in his capacity of Ambassador, whereupon the Queen said to him: "Are you any relation to that Chateaubriand who has written *something?*"

Lord Byron, laughing heartily at the anecdote, hastened to go and repeat it to the Countess G——.

* See Sainte-Beuve, vol. i., p. 286.

The same sentiment had disenchanted him with Monti, whom he had so much admired at Milan, and with several other rival poets.

When Lord Byron heard it said of any one, "he has changed sides, he has abandoned his party, he has forfeited his word," one might feel sure that all his natural indulgence, generally so great, was gone; he looked upon such a fault as forming only a despicable variety of the vice he never forgave, viz., untruth. At most, he could only make an exception in favour of women.

"I have received a very pretty note from Madame de Staël," we read in his memoranda of 1813; "her works are my delight, and she also (for half an hour). But I do not like her politics, or, at least, *her changes* in politics. If she had been, *æqualis ab incepto*, that would be nothing. But, she is a woman . . . . . and, intellectually, she has done more than all the rest of her sex put together."

Nevertheless, constancy in idea being subservient to the consent of the mind, must undoubtedly have undergone oscillations with Lord Byron. That was, however, only the case with regard to ideas which could be discussed, and which required to pass through the ordeal of long reflection and practice, before being fully adopted by him. But religious ideas were not of this number; on the contrary, they held the first place in the order of those to be accepted and raised into principles by every man of honour and good sense. For, whatever may have been his fluctuations with regard to certain points of religious doctrine, sects and modes of worship, it is certain that in great fundamental matters his mind

never seriously doubted, and thus escaped the influence of friends less sensible,—of Mathews in his early youth, and of Shelley at a later period.* That touching Prayer to the Divinity, written in boyhood, and which is so full of hope and faith in the soul's immortality, and in the existence of a personal God, he might have signed again when he came to act instead of writing, as also on his deathbed.†

Between the commencement of his career at eighteen and its close at the age of thirty-six, it is easy to see, by his language, correspondence, and works, that his mind had passed successively through different phases before arriving at the last result. The religious idea is more or less clear. Nevertheless, one perceives a golden ray ever present, connecting the different periods of his life, keeping up heat and light in his soul, and giving unity to his whole career. Hope, desire, and I may almost say, a sort of latent faith, always influenced him until they merged into the conviction whose light never more abandoned him.

At fifteen years of age, while at Harrow, he fought with Lord Calthorpe for calling him an *atheist;* at eighteen, he wrote his beautiful profession of faith in the Prayer to the Divinity, and in the touching "Adieu," which he wrote when he thought he would soon die. At nineteen, giving the list in his memoranda of books already read (a list hardly credible), he says: "With regard to books on religion, I have

* See chapter on 'Religion.'

† See this prayer in chapter on 'Religion.'

read Blair, Porteous, Tillotson, Hooker,—all very tiresome. I detest books about religion, but I adore and love my God, apart from the blasphemous notions of sectarians, and without believing in their absurd and damnable heresies, mysteries, &c." At twenty-one, when he had passed through the double influence exercised by Pagan classical literature and German philosophies, and was in a transition state, he wrote 'Childe Harold;' but the sceptical tendencies to be found in one stanza appear like a bravado, the result of spleen, a feeling that made him suffer and which he speedily threw aside. For he wrote, at the same time, the stanza upon the death of a friend, whom he *hopes to see again in the land of souls*, and afterwards, the elegies to Thyrza, which are full of *faith in immortality*. At thirty, writing some philosophical reflections in his memorandum-book, he says: "One cannot doubt the immortality of the soul."

And, elsewhere, he also says that Christianity appears to him essentially founded on the immateriality of the soul, and that, for this reason, the Christian materialism of Priestley had always struck him as being a deadly sort of doctrine. "Believe, if you please," added he, "in the material resurrection of the body, but not without a soul: it would be cruel indeed, if, after having had a soul in this world (and our mind, by whatever name you call it, is really a soul), we were to be separated from it in the other, even for material immortality! I confess my partiality for mind."

Alluding to the systems of philosophy that do not

admit creation according to Genesis, he says, that "even if we could get rid of Adam and Eve, of the apple and the serpent, we should not know what to put in their place; that the difficulty would not be overcome; that things must have had a beginning, it matters not when and how; that creation must have had an origin and a Creator. For creation is much more natural and easy to imagine than a concurrence of atoms; that all things may be traced to their sources even though they end by emptying themselves into an ocean."

We have seen what he said to Parry upon religion* and its ministers, upon God Almighty and the hope of enjoying eternal life, only a few weeks before his glorious death.

And when the hand of death was already upon him, a few moments before his agony, did he not say that eternity and space were already before his eyes, but that on this point, thanks to God, *he was happy and tranquil?* that the thought of living *eternally*, of living another life, was a great consolation to him? that Christianity was the purest and most liberal of all religions (although a little spoiled by the ministers of Christ, often the worst enemies of its liberal and charitable doctrines); but that, as to the questions depending on these doctrines, and which God alone, all powerful, can determine, in Him alone did he wish to rest?

But if Lord Byron was constant to a certain order of ideas, was he equally constant in his affections? Moore again shall answer:—

"The same distrust in his own steadiness, thus

* See chapter on 'Religion.'

keeping alive in him a conscientious self-watchfulness concurred not a little, I have no doubt, with the innate kindness of his nature, to preserve so constant and unbroken the greater number of his attachments through life—some of them, as in the instance of his mother, owing evidently more to a sense of duty than of real affection, the consistency with which, so creditably to the strength of his character, they were maintained."

But, putting aside family affections, where constancy may appear a duty and a necessity, let us see what Lord Byron was in affections of his own choice, —such as friendship and love, where inconstancy is a sin that the world easily forgives.

We have seen what the friendship of Lord Byron meant. Death destroyed several of the young existences with which his heart was bound up, and his first sorrows sprang from these misfortunes. But *never* by his will, caprice, or fault, did he lose a single friend! Even the wrongs they inflicted, while they weighed upon his mind, altered his opinions sometimes, dispelled some sweet illusions and grieved his heart, yet could not succeed in changing it. He contented himself with judging the individual in such cases, sometimes with philosophical indulgence which he was only too much accustomed to hide under the veil of pleasantry, and sometimes in showing openly how much his heart was wounded.*

This constancy of heart that he showed in friendship, was it equally his in matters of love? By his energy of soul, unable ever to forget anything, Lord

* See octaves 48, 49 and 50, canto xiv., 'Don Juan;' and several in Childe Harold,' cantos iii. and iv.

Byron possessed the first condition towards constancy in love. Contrary to those unstable persons who say that they cease to love, for the simple reason that they have already loved too much, it might rather be said of Lord Byron that he still loved on only because he had loved. In all his poems, he has idealised fidelity and constancy in love. All the heroes of his poems are faithful and constant, from Conrad, Lara, Selim, all those of the Oriental poems of his youth, up to those of his later life, to his Biblical mysteries. Even the angels, the seraphim, in that beautiful poem, written shortly before his death, 'Heaven and Earth,' prefer suffering to inconstancy,—to forfeit heaven rather than return there without their beloved. In vain the archangel Raphael presses the two amorous seraphim to come back to the celestial sphere, to abandon the two sisters, and menaces them. Samiasa replies :—

"It may not be:
We have chosen, and will endure."

The poet gives it to be understood that they will be punished; which forms the moral of the piece. Don Juan himself refuses the love of a beautiful sultana, from fidelity to the remembrance of his Haidée; and when, afterwards, he does yield, he seems to bear with, rather than to have sought success. One feels that this idealisation of fidelity and constancy really has its source in Lord Byron's heart, and not in his imagination. Still, however, the chief and undeniable proof must be drawn from his own life.

The first condition for judging any one impartially

with regard to inconstancy in love, is not only to know the facts and real circumstances connected with an intimacy, but especially to know the nature of the sentiment to which the name of love has been applied. We are aware that, at fifteen years of age, Lord Byron's heart was already under the influence of a young girl of eighteen.* The mere disproportion of age prevents such an affection from offering any grounds on which to examine his capability of being constant. It is well known how much suffering this early passion caused him. The object of it, after denying him no token of reciprocal love that was innocent, giving him her picture, agreeing to meetings, receiving all the spontaneous, innocent, confiding, tenderness of his young and ardent heart, left him in the lurch one fine day, on account of his youth, in order to marry a fashionable, vulgar man. And thus did she destroy the charm which governed his heart. Precocious reflection, with its accompaniment of knowledge, agitating, confusing, throwing young souls on the road to error, succeeded to his enchantment. He then began (at sixteen) to talk of vanished illusions; and, for want of something better, allowed himself to be carried away, and to lead the ordinary University life. He evidently only did what others did; but he was made of different materials; and while they thought this dissipation very natural, and, tranquil in their inferiority, believed themselves innocent, he alone disapproved of his own conduct and blamed it. The better to escape all this, he went in search of forgetfulness amid the fresh breezes of ocean, across the Pyrenees, among the ruins of ancient

* See chapter on 'Generosity.'

civilisation. Yet, after two years' travelling, on his return to England, his soul all love, his heart burning with an infinite ardour, through that intoxication of success which weakens, through that eagerness for emotion caused by his vivacity of mind, and even by a sort of psychological curiosity, Lord Byron did fall into new attachments. And these attachments, not being of a nature that could stand the trial of reflection, caused him to give up known for unknown objects. But his soul was ever agitated, in commotion, and, even when he changed, it was through necessity rather than caprice. In order to escape once more from himself, from the allurements of the senses, from the effects of the enthusiasm which his personal beauty and his genius excited among women, he resolved to take refuge in an indissoluble tie, in a tie formed by duty, not love. Perhaps he might have found strength for perseverance in the beauty of the sacrifice. His soul was quite capable of it. But destiny pursued him in his choice, and rendered it impossible. To his misfortune, he married Miss Milbank.* Again he drifted away from the right path, but, this time, with the resolution of keeping his heart independent, his soul free and unfettered by any indissoluble tie.† But in coming to this determination at the age of twenty-eight, he had not consulted his heart, ever athirst for infinitude. Vainly he sought to lull it, to keep it earthwards, to laugh at his own aspirations—useless labour! One day it broke loose. Nature is like water; sooner or later it must find its equilibrium. From that day forth Psyche's lamp had no more light; reflection had no

* See chapter on 'Marriage.' † See 'Life at Venice, at Milan.'

more power; and the love which had taken possession of his soul left him not again, but accompanied him to his last hour, through the modifications inevitable in earthly affections. This constancy maintained thenceforth without a struggle, he understood at once; and felt that the unchanging sentiment belonged equally to his will and to his destiny. "*Cœlum, non animam mutant qui trans mare currunt*," wrote he one day at Ravenna, on the opening page of 'Jacopo Ortis,' Foscolo's work, that had just fallen into his hands; for he knew that no one could read this avowal of his heart where he had traced it. After having remarked the strange coincidence by which this volume was brought a second time before him, just when he was, as once before, in extreme agitation, he continued thus:—

"Most men bewail not having attained the object of their desires. I had oftener to deplore the obtaining mine, for I cannot love moderately, nor quiet my heart with mere fruition. The letters of this Italian Werther are very interesting; at least I think so, but my present feelings hardly render me a competent judge."

Another time, a volume of 'Corinne,' translated into Italian, fell under his notice at Ravenna. In the same language, which no one then about him could read, he confided to this book the secret of his heart, and, after having poured out its fulness in words of noble melting tenderness, concluded thus:—"Think of me when Alps and sea shall separate us; *but that will never come to pass, unless you so will it.*"

It was not willed, and therefore the separation did not take place. But, alas! the day arrived when he

was so entangled in a multiplicity of complications, and honour spoke so loudly, that both sides were forced to will it.

Whoever should consider this departure the result of inconstancy, is incapable to form an estimate of his great soul. His affection, that had lasted for years, admitted no longer of any uneasiness, for it was brought into complete harmony with that of her he loved. Naturally his heart underwent the transformations produced by time. His affection was gradually acquiring the sweetness of unchanging friendship, without losing the charm appertaining to ardour of passion. The sacrifice entailed by this departure was in proportion to these sentiments. "Often," says M——, "during the passage, we saw his eyes filled with tears." The sadness described by Mr. Barry of his last visit to Albano has been seen.* These tears and this sadness betray the extent of his sublime sacrifice! And then, when once arrived in Greece, although determined to brave all the storms gathering above his head, he wrote unceasingly to Madame G——, with that ease and simplicity which not only forbade any exaggeration of sentiment, but even made him restrain its expression; which was also rendered imperative by the circumstances then surrounding her.

"I shall fulfil the object of my mission from the committee, and then . . return to Italy. . . Pray be as cheerful and tranquil as you can, and be assured that there is nothing here that can excite anything but a wish to be with you again, though we are

* See chapter on 'Strength of Soul.'

very kindly treated by the English here of all descriptions."

"September 11.

"You may be sure that the moment I can join you again will be as welcome to me as at any period of our acquaintance. There is nothing very attractive here to occupy my attention; but both honour and inclination demand that I should serve the Greek cause. I wish that this cause, as well as the affairs of Spain, were favourably settled, that I might return to Italy and relate all my adventures to you."

Thus much for his constancy when he truly loved. It would be worth inquiry how many men and how many writers have carried their ideal of constancy into their own life to a higher degree than Lord Byron? My opinion is that if, the same circumstances given, the number went a little beyond one, we might consider the result very satisfactory.

After having seen that Lord Byron was unchangeable in great principles and ideas, as soon as his mind was convinced, and that he was constant to all the true sentiments of his heart, it still remains to be shown whether he was equally so in his tastes and habits.

It may be said of most men that they have no character, because they often vary in taste, and without even perceiving it. That could not be asserted of Lord Byron, although sometimes, according to his self-accusing custom, he declared himself to be inconstant.

The truth is that he was, on the contrary, remarkably steadfast in his tastes. The nature of his preferences, and the conclusions to be drawn from them, will form the subject of another chapter. We shall only speak of them here as relating to constancy.

"We shall often have occasion," says Moore, "to remark the fidelity to early habits and tastes which distinguished Lord Byron." Moore then observes the extraordinary constancy Lord Byron showed in clinging to all the impressions of youth; and he adduces as a proof the care with which he preserved the notes and letters written by his favourite comrades at school, even when they were younger than himself. These letters he enriched with dates and notes, after years of long interval, while very few of his childish effusions have been kept by the opposite parties. Moore also notes several other features of this constancy, which he continued to practise throughout life. For instance, his punctuality in answering letters immediately, despite his distaste for epistolary effusions; and his love for simple music, such as that of the ballads that used to attract him at sixteen to Miss Pigott's saloon. It was partly this same taste that made him enjoy so much, at twenty-six, the evenings he passed at his friend Kinnaird's house (some months before his marriage, the last of his London life), when Moore would sing his favourite songs, bringing tears to Byron's eyes. And it was this same taste that subsequently drew him to the piano at which Madame G—— sat, at Ravenna, Pisa, Genoa; and which, when she played or sung Mozart's and Rossini's favourite motets, made him say that he no longer loved any other music but hers.

What he had once loved never tired him. Memory was to him like an enchanter's wand, throwing some charm into objects which in themselves possessed none. He loved the land where he had loved, however naturally unattractive it might be: witness Ravenna, and Italy in general.

"Possession of what I truly love," said he, in the very rare moments when he did himself justice, "does not cloy me." He loved the mountains of Greece, because they recalled those of Scotland; he would have loved other mountains, because they recalled those of Greece.

A few months before his death, he said in his charming poem 'The Island,'—

> "Long have I roam'd through lands which are not mine,
> Adored the Alp, and loved the Apennine,
> Revered Parnassus, and beheld the steep
> Jove's Ida and Olympus crown the deep:
> But 't was not all long ages' lore, nor all
> *Their* nature held me in their thrilling thrall;
> The infant rapture still survived the boy,
> And Loch-na-gar with Ida look'd o'er Troy,
> Mix'd Celtic memories with the Phrygian mount,
> And Highland linns with Castalie's clear fount.
> Forgive me, Homer's universal shade!
> Forgive me, Phœbus! that my fancy stray'd;
> The north and nature taught me to adore
> Your scenes sublime, from those beloved before."*

He would love a place of abode because he had loved when in it. The same with regard to a dwelling, a walk, a melody, a perfume, a form, and even a dish; he who cared so little for any sort of food. His childish impressions, his readings at that age, had a great deal to do with his choice of poetic subjects afterwards; and we find them again reproduced even

* 'The Island,' canto ii., stanza 12.

in his last dramatic work. 'Werner,' written in such a fine moral sense, is the result of the 'Canterbury Tale' read in childhood. Never was man more constant in his habits and tastes than he; and, indeed, it required that indefinable charm of soul he possessed, and which pervaded his whole being, to prevent monotony from perverting this quality into a fault.

Why, then, have his biographers talked so much of his mobility, if it were not to make Lord Byron pass for a creature swayed by every fresh impulse, and incapable of steady feeling? I have given the first reason elsewhere.* But I will add another, namely, that they have transferred the qualities of the *poet to the man* in an erroneous manner; that to the versatility of his genius (one of his great gifts, and which ever belonged to him) they have added mobility of character, such as often, too often, perhaps, influenced his conversation, and tinctured his external fictitious nature. But they have done so without examining his actions, without reflecting that this mobility vanished as it was written, or in the light play of his witty conversation, or the trivial acts of his life. Otherwise they would have been forced to confess, that it never had any influence on his conduct in matters of moment, that he was persevering and firm to an extremely rare degree in all things *essential* and which constitute *man in his moral and social capacity.*

We may then sum up by saying that Lord Byron generally established on an impregnable rock, guarded by unbending principles, those great virtues to which principles are essential; but that, after making these

* See chapter on 'Mobility.'

treasures secure—for treasures they are to the man of honour and worth—once having placed them beyond the reach of sensibility and sentiment, he may sometimes have allowed the *lesser virtues* (within ordinary bounds) such indulgence as flowed from his kindly nature, and such as his youth rendered natural to a feeling heart and ardent imagination. Like all men, he was only truly firm under serious circumstances, when he wished to show energy in fulfilling a duty. Thus Lord Byron allowed his pen to jest, to mark the follies of men: sometimes attacking them boldly in front, sometimes aiming light arrows aslant, ridiculing, chastising, as humour or fancy prompted; and he gave himself the same liberty of language in private conversation, according to the character of those with whom he conversed. On all these occasions his genius undoubtedly gave itself up to versatility. But let us not forget that all that which changes and becomes effaced in hearts of inconstant mood, and which ought not to change in men of honour and worth, never did vary in him. Let us acknowledge, in short, that, if mobility belonged to the *sensitive* parts of his nature, constancy no less characterised his *moral and intellectual* being.

CHAPTER II.

THE COURAGE AND FORTITUDE OF LORD BYRON.

All the moral qualities that flow from energy—courage, intrepidity, fortitude; in a word, self-control—shone with too much lustre in Lord Byron's soul for us to pass them over in silence, or even to call only superficial attention to them.

But, it may be said, Why speak of his courage? No one ever called it in question. Besides, is courage a virtue? It is hardly a quality; in reality it is but a duty.—Yes, undoubtedly, that is true, but there are different kinds of courage, and Lord Byron's was of such a peculiar nature, and showed itself under such uncommon circumstances as to justify observation, for it evinces a quality necessary to be noticed by all who seek to portray his great soul with the wish of arriving at a close resemblance.

"Whatever virtue may be allowed to belong to personal courage, it is most assuredly those who are endowed by nature with the liveliest imaginations, and who have, therefore, most vividly and simultaneously before their eyes all the remote and possible consequences of danger, that are most deserving of whatever praise attends the exercise of that virtue."

Certainly Lord Byron made part of the category, so that Moore adds:—

"The courage of Lord Byron, as all his companions in peril testify, was of that noblest kind which rises with the greatness of the occasion, and becomes the more self-collected and resisting the more imminent the danger."

Thus, far from its being the natural impetuosity that causes rash natures to rush into danger, Lord Byron's courage was quite as much the result of reflection as of impulse. *His was courage of the noblest kind*, a quality mixed up with other fine moral faculties, shining with light of its own, yet all combining to lend mutual lustre. This is, indeed, what ought to be called *fortitude* and *self-control*, and this is what we remark in Lord Byron. But, in order not to sin against the scientific classification used by moralists, and which requires sub-divisions, we will isolate it for a moment, and examine it under the name of courage, presence of mind, and coolness.

Unaffected in his bravery, as in all things else, Lord Byron did not seek dangers, but when they presented themselves to him he met them with lofty intrepidity.

To give some examples — and the difficulty is to choose—let us consider him under different circumstances that occurred during his first travels in the East.

While at Malta he was on the point of fighting a duel, through some misunderstanding with an officer on General Oakes' staff. The meeting had been fixed for an early hour, but Lord Byron slept so soundly that his companion was obliged to awaken him. On arriving at the spot, which was near the

shore, his adversary was not yet there; and Lord Byron, although his luggage had already been taken on board the brig that was to convey him to Albania, wished to give him the chance at least of another hour. During all this long interval he amused himself very quietly walking about the beach perfectly unconcerned.

At last an officer, sent by his antagonist, arrived on the ground, bringing not only an explanation of how the delay had arisen, but likewise all the excuses and satisfaction Lord Byron could desire for the supposed offence. Thus the duel did not take place.

The gentleman who was to be his second could not sufficiently praise the coolness and firm courage shown by Lord Byron throughout this affair.

Some time later Lord Byron was on the mountains of Epirus with his friend and fellow-traveller, Mr. Hobhouse (now Lord Broughton). These mountains being then infested with banditti, they were accompanied by a numerous escort, and even by one of the secretaries, as well as several retainers belonging to the famous Ali Pasha of Joannina, whom they had just been visiting. One evening, seeing a storm impending, Mr. Hobhouse hastened on in front with part of their suite, in order sooner to reach a neighbouring hamlet, and get shelter prepared. Lord Byron followed with the remainder of the escort. Before he could arrive, however, the storm burst, and soon became terrific. Mr. Hobhouse, who had long been safe under cover in the village, could see nothing of his friend.

"It was seven in the evening," says Mr. Hobhouse,

in his account of it, "and the fury of the storm had become quite alarming. Never before or since have I witnessed one so terrible. The roof of the hovel in which we had taken shelter trembled beneath violent gusts of rain and wind, and the thunder kept roaring without intermission, for the echo from one mountain crest had not ceased ere another frightful crash broke above our heads. The plain, and distant hills, visible through the chinks of the hut, seemed on fire. In short, the tempest was terrific; quite worthy of the Jupiter of ancient Greece. The peasants, no less religious than their ancestors, confessed their fears; the women were crying around, and the men, at every new flash of lightning, invoked the name of God, making the sign of the cross."

Meanwhile hours passed, midnight drew near, the storm was far from abating, and Lord Byron had not appeared. Mr. Hobhouse, in great alarm, ordered fires to be lighted on the heights, and guns to be let off in all directions. At length, towards one in the morning, a man, all pale and panic-stricken, soaked through to the skin, suddenly entered the cabin, making loud cries, exclamations, and gestures of despair. He belonged to the escort, and speedily related the danger to which they had been exposed, and in which Lord Byron and his followers still were, and urging the necessity for sending off at once horses, guides, and men with torches, to extricate them from it.

It appears that at the commencement of the storm, when only three miles from the village, Lord Byron, through the fault of his escort, lost the right path.

After wandering about as chance directed, in complete ignorance of their whereabouts, and on the brink of precipices, they had stopped at last near a Turkish cemetery and close to a torrent, which they had been enabled to distinguish through the flashes of lightning. Lord Byron was exposed to *all the fury of the storm for nine consecutive hours;* his guides, instead of lending him any assistance, only increased the general confusion, running about on all sides, because they had been menaced with death by the dragoman George, who, in a paroxysm of rage and fear, had fired off his pistols without warning anybody, and Lord Byron's English servants, fancying they were attacked by robbers, set up loud cries.

It was three in the morning before the party could reach the shelter where their friends awaited them. During these nine consecutive hours of danger, Lord Byron never once lost his self-possession or serenity, or even that pleasant vein of humour which made him always see the ridiculous side of things.

About the same period Lord Byron and his companion, after having visited Eleusis, were obliged, by stress of weather, to stop some days at Keratea. Having heard of a wonderful cavern situated on Mount Parné, they determined to visit it. On arriving at the entrance they lighted torches of resinous wood, and, preceded by a guide, penetrated through a small aperture, dragging themselves along the ground until they reached a sort of subterranean hall, ornamented with arcades and high cupolas of crystal, supported by columns of shining marcasite; the hall itself opened out into large horizontal chambers, or else conducted to dark, deep yawning

abysses towards the centre of the mountain. After having strayed from one grotto to another, the travellers arrived near a fountain of crystal water. There they stopped, till, seeing their torches wane low, they thought of retracing their steps. But, after walking for some minutes in the labyrinth, they again found themselves beside the mysterious fountain. Then they grew alarmed, for their guide acknowledged with *terror that he had forgotten the itinerary of the cavern, and no longer knew where to find the outlet.*

While they were wandering thus from one grotto to another, in a sort of despair, and occasionally dragging themselves along to get through narrow openings, their last torch was consumed. They remained a long time in total darkness, not knowing what to do, when, as if by miracle, a feeble ray of light made itself visible, and, directing their steps towards it, they ended by reaching the mouth of the cavern. Certainly it would be difficult to meet with a more alarming situation. Mr. Hobhouse, while confessing that for some moments it had been impossible to look forward to anything else but the chance of a horrible death, declared that, not only Lord Byron's presence of mind and coolness were admirable in the teeth of such a prospect, but also that his playful humour never forsook him, and helped to keep up their spirits during minutes that must have seemed years to all of them.

It was during this same journey that, finding the mountains which separated them from the Morea were infested with banditti, they embarked on board a vessel of war, called the 'Turk.' A tempest broke

out, and its violence, joined to the ignorance betrayed by the captain and sailors, put the vessel in great danger. Shipwreck seemed inevitable, and close at hand. Nothing was heard on board but cries, lamentations, and prayers. Lord Byron alone remained calm, doing everything in his power to console and encourage the rest; and then at length, when he saw that his efforts were useless, he wrapped himself up in his Albanian cloak, and lay down on the deck, *going tranquilly to sleep until fate should decide his destiny.*

After having given his mother a simple description of this tempest, he adds:—"I have learned to philosophise during my travels, and, if I had not, what use is there in complaining?"

And Moore says:—

"I have heard the poet's fellow-traveller describe this remarkable instance of his coolness and courage even still more strikingly than it is here stated by himself. Finding that he was unable to be of any service in the exertions which their very serious danger called for, after a laugh or two at the panic of his valet, he not only wrapped himself up and lay down, in the manner here mentioned, but, when their difficulties were surmounted, was found fast asleep."

These adventures happened to him when he was only twenty-one years of age, and within the course of a few weeks. But all his life he gave the same proofs of courage when circumstances called for them.

And since we have chosen these examples from his first journey into Greece, at the beginning of his

career, let us select some others from the last, which took place near its close.

Mr. H. Brown having been asked by Lord Harrington what his impressions were of Lord Byron, replied, "Lord Byron was extremely calm in presence of danger. Here are two instances that I witnessed myself:—A Greek, named Costantino Zalichi, to whom his Lordship had given his passage, once took up one of Manton's pistols, belonging to Lord Byron. It went off by accident, and the ball passed quite close to Lord Byron's temple. Without the least emotion Lord Byron began explaining to the Greek how such accidents could be avoided.

"On another occasion, near the Roman coast, we observed a suspicious-looking little vessel, armed, and apparently full of people. It was towards the end of the last war with Spain, during which many acts of piracy had been committed in the Mediterranean, and our captain was much alarmed. We were followed all day by this vessel, and, towards evening, it seemed so ready for action that we no longer doubted being attacked. However a breeze arose, and darkness came on soon after, whereupon we lost sight of it. Lord Byron, while the danger lasted, remained perfectly calm, giving his orders with the greatest tranquillity and reflection." *

And Lord Harrington, then Colonel Stanhope, says himself, in his Essay on Lord Byron:—

"Lord Byron was the *beau idéal* of chivalry. It might have lowered him in the esteem of wise men, if he had not given such extraordinary proofs of the noblest courage.

* Parry, 206.

"Even at moments of the greatest danger, Lord Byron *contemplated death with philosophical calm*. For instance, at the moment of returning from the alarming attack which had surprised him in my room (at Missolonghi), he immediately asked, with the most perfect self-possession, whether his life were in danger, as, in that case, he required the doctor to tell him so, *for he was not afraid of death*.

"Shortly after that frightful convulsion, when, weakened by loss of blood, he was lying on his bed of suffering, with his nervous system completely shaken, a band of mutinous Suliotes, in their splendid dirty costumes, burst suddenly into his room, brandishing their weapons, and loudly demanding their savage rights. Lord Byron, as if electrified by the unexpected act, appeared to have recovered his health, and, the more the Suliotes cried out and threatened, the more *his cool courage triumphed*. *The scene was really sublime*." *

And Count Gamba, in his interesting narrative of 'Lord Byron's Last Journey into Greece,' adds:—

"It is impossible to do justice to the coolness and magnanimity Lord Byron showed on all great occasions. Under ordinary circumstances he was irritable, but the sight of danger calmed him instantly, restoring the free exercise of all the faculties of his noble nature. A man *more indomitable, or firmer in the hour of danger than Lord Byron was, never existed*." †

But enough of these proofs, which, perhaps, say nothing new to the reader. Nevertheless, as they may call up again the pleasure ever afforded by the

* Essay by Colonel Stanhope. † 'Last Journey to Greece,' p. 174.

spectacle of great moral beauty, let us further add—the better to set forth the nature of Lord Byron's wonderful intrepidity in face of danger—that his energetic soul loved to contemplate those sublime things in Nature that are usually endured with terror. Tempests, the thunder's roll, the lightning's flash—any mysterious display of Nature's forces, so that its violence occasioned neither misfortune nor suffering to sensitive beings—aroused in him the keenest sense of enjoyment, which in turn ministered to his genius, incapable of finding complete satisfaction in the beautiful, and ever yearning passionately after the sublime.

As to his fortitude, that self-control which makes one bear affliction with external serenity, Lord Byron possessed it in as high a degree as he did firmness with regard to material obstacles and dangers.

Endowed with exquisite sensibility, the great poet assuredly went through cruel trials during his stormy career; but instead of ostentatiously exhibiting his sorrows, Lord Byron on many occasions rather exaggerated the delicacy that led him to veil them under an appearance of stoicism. Only very rarely did his poetry echo back the sufferings endured within.

Once, nevertheless, he wished, and rightly, to perpetuate in his verses the memory of the indignities heaped upon him by a guilty world. He wished that the great struggle he had been obliged to sustain against his destiny should not be forgotten; he wished to show how much his heart had been torn, his hopes sapped, his name blighted by the deepest injuries, the meanest perfidy. He had seen, he said, of what beings with a human semblance were capable,

from the frightful roar of foaming calumny to the low whisper of vile reptiles, adroitly distilling poison: double-visaged Januses, who supply the place of words by the language of the eyes, who lie without saying a syllable, and, by dint of a shrug or an affected sigh, impose on fools their unspoken calumnies. Yes, he had to undergo all that, and for once he wished it to be known.

He owed it to himself to make this complaint; his total silence would have been wrong; it was necessary once for all to defend his *character* and reputation, and when he ran the risk of losing the esteem of the world his sensibility could not show itself in too lively a manner.

But if he thus raised his voice to immortalize these indignities, it was not because he recoiled from suffering.

"Let him come forward," exclaimed he, "whoever has seen me bow the head, or has remarked my courage wane with suffering."

Already, at the time of the unexampled persecution raised against him in London, when the separation from his wife took place, he wrote to Murray:—

"February 20th, 1816.

"You need not be in any apprehension or grief on my account. Were I to be beaten down by the world and its inheritors, I should have succumbed to many things years ago. You must not mistake my not bullying for dejection; nor imagine that because I feel, I am to faint." *

* Moore, 'Letters,' p. 241.

In all he wrote at this fatal period of his life, one perceives the wide gaping wound, which is however endured with the strength of a Titan, who at twenty-nine is to become quite a philosopher, good, gentle, almost resigned.

> "The camel labours with the heaviest load,
> And the wolf dies in silence,—not bestow'd
> In vain should such example be; if they,
> Things of ignoble or of savage mood,
> Endure and shrink not, we of nobler clay
> May temper it to bear,—it is but for a day."*

Like all those who feel deeply the joys and griefs of their fellow-men, Lord Byron had received from nature all that could render him capable of moderating the external expression of his sensibility, when injustice was personal to himself. Moreover, circumstances, alas! had only too much favoured the development of this noble faculty in him. For, very early, he had received severe lessons from those terrible masters who nurture great souls to self-control; from reverses, vanished illusions, perils, wrongs. The storms however it was his destiny to encounter, though violent, not only did not cause him to be shipwrecked, but even helped to encircle his brow with the martyr's halo.

But, we may be asked, whether this great control which Lord Byron exercised over himself, with regard to obstacles, dangers, and human injustice, existed equally with regard to his own passions. To those who should doubt it, and who, forgetting that Lord Byron only lived the age of passions,

* 'Childe Harold.'

without taking into consideration all the circumstances that rendered difficult to him what is easier for others, should pretend that Lord Byron gave way to his passions oftener than he warred against them, to such we would say: "What was he doing, then, when, at barely twenty-two years of age, he adopted an anchorite's *régime*, so as to render his soul more *independent* of *matter?* When he shut himself up at home, with the self-imposed task of writing whole poems before he came out, in order to *overcome his thoughts, and maintain them in a line contrary to that which his passions demanded?* When, grieved, calumniated, outraged, he *preferred exile rather than yield to just resentment*, and in order to avoid the danger of finding himself in situations where he *might not have preserved his self-control?*"

Have they forgotten that at Venice he subjected himself to the ungrateful task of learning languages *more than difficult*, and of working at other *dry studies*, in order to *fix his thoughts on them, and divert them from resentment and anger?*

He writes to Murray: "I find the Armenian language, which is double (*the literary and the vulgar tongue*), difficult, but not insuperably so (at least I hope not). I shall continue. I have found it necessary to chain my mind down to very severe studies, and as this is the most difficult I can find here, it will be a *net for the serpent*."

And have we not seen him overcome himself, just as he was setting out to go where his heart called him (for, notwithstanding all his efforts, it had ceased to be independent), and thus defer a journey he

sighed for, only to *exercise acts of generosity, and liberate one of his gondoliers from the Austrian conscription?*

If a true biography could be written of Lord Byron we should see a constant struggle going on in this young man against his passions. And can more be asked of men than to fight against them? Victory is the proof and the reward of combat. If sometimes, as with every man, victory failed him, oftener still he did achieve it; and it is certain that his great desire always was to free himself from the tyranny of his passions.

His last triumphs were not only great—they were sublime.

The sadness that overwhelmed him during the latter part of his stay at Genoa is known. The struggles he had to maintain against his own heart may be conceived.

It is also known how, being driven back into port by a storm, he resolved on visiting the palace of Albaro; and it may well be imagined that the hours passed in this dwelling, then silent and deserted, must have seemed like those that count as years of anguish in the life of great and feeling souls, among whom visions of the future float before the over-excited mind. It cannot be doubted that he would then willingly have given up his fatal idea of leaving Italy; indeed he declared so to Mr. Barry, who was with him; but the sentiment of his own dignity and of his promise given triumphed over his feelings.

The night which followed this gloomy day again saw Lord Byron struggling against stormy waves, and not only determined on pursuing his voyage,

but also on appearing calm and serene to his fellow-travellers.

Could peace, however, have dwelt within his soul? To show it outwardly must he not have struggled?

"I often saw Lord Byron during his last voyage from Genoa to Greece," says Mr. H. Browne, in a letter written to Colonel Stanhope; "I often saw him in the midst of the greatest gaiety suddenly become pensive, *and his eyes fill with tears*, doubtless from some painful remembrance. On these occasions he generally got up and retired to the solitude of his cabin."

And Colonel Stanhope, afterwards Lord Harrington, who only knew Lord Byron later at Missolonghi, also says: "I have often observed Lord Byron in the middle of some gay animated conversation, stop, meditate, and his eyes to fill with tears."

And all that he did in that fatal Greece, was it not a perpetual triumph over himself, his tastes, his desires, the wants of his nature and his heart?

He saw nothing in Greece, he wrote to Mme. G——, that did not make him wish to return to Italy, and yet he remained in Greece. He would have preferred waiting in the Ionian Islands, and yet he set out for that fatal Missolonghi! Liberal by principle, and aristocratic by birth, taste, and habits, he was condemned to continual intercourse with vulgar, turbulent, barbarous men, to come into contact with things repugnant to his nature and his tastes, and to struggle against a thousand difficulties —a thousand torments, moral and physical; he felt,

and knew, that even life would fail him if he did not leave Missolonghi, yet he remained. Everything, in short, throughout this last stage of the noble pilgrim, proclaims his empire over self. His triumph was always beautiful, and often sublime, but, alas! he paid for it with his life.

CHAPTER III.

THE MODESTY OF LORD BYRON.

Among the qualities that belonged to his genius, the one which formed its chief ornament has been too much forgotten.

Modesty constituted a beautiful quality of his soul. If it has not been formally denied him; if, even among those whom we term his biographers, some have conceded modesty as pertaining to Lord Byron's genius, they have done so timidly; and have at the same time indirectly denied it by accusing him of pride.

Was Lord Byron proud as a poet and as a man? We shall have occasion to answer this question in another chapter. Here we shall only examine his claims to modesty; and we say, without hesitation, that it was as great in him as it has ever been in others. It shines in every line of his poetry and his prose, at every age and in all the circumstances of his life.

"There is no real modesty" (says a great moralist of the present day) "without diffidence of self, inspired by a deep sense of the beautiful and by the fear of not being able to reach the perfection we conceive."

As a poet, Lord Byron always undervalued or despised himself. As a man, he did so still more; he

exaggerated this quality so far as to convert it into a fault, for he calumniated himself.

We have seen how unambitious Lord Byron was as a child, and with what facility he allowed his comrades to surpass him in intellectual exercises, reserving for his sole ambition the wish of excelling them in boyish games and in bodily exercises.

As a youth he did nothing but censure his own conduct, which was not at all different from that which his comrades thought allowable in themselves. We have seen with what modest feelings he published his first poems; with what docility he accepted criticisms, and yielded to the advice of friends whom he esteemed.

When cruel criticism showed him neither mercy nor justice, notwithstanding his youthful age, he lost, it is true, serenity and moderation of spirit, but never once put aside his modesty.

Instigated by a passion for truth, he exclaims in his first satire,—

> "Truth! rouse some genuine bard, and guide his hand
> To drive this pestilence from out the land."

Certainly, he does not spare censure in this passionate satire; but, while inflicting it, he questions whether he should be the one to apply the lash:—

> "E'en I, least thinking of a thoughtless throng,
> Just skill'd to know the right and choose the wrong."

It was during the time of his first travels that Lord Byron wrote his first *chef-d'œuvre*;* but so little was he aware of possessing great faculties that, while suffering from the exactions and torments they

* The first two cantos of 'Childe Harold.'

created within him, he only asked in return some amusement, an occupation for long hours of solitude.

Having begun 'Childe Harold' as a memorial of his travelling impressions, he communicated it, on his return to England, to the friend who had been his companion throughout. But, instead of meeting with indulgence and encouragement, this friend only blamed the poem, and called it an extravagant conception.

He was, nevertheless, a competent judge and a poet himself. Why, then, such severity? Did he wish to sacrifice the poet to the man, fearing for his friend lest the allusions therein made should lend further weapons to the malice of his enemies? Did he dread for himself, and for those among their comrades who, two years before, had donned the preacher's garb at Newstead Abbey, lest the voice of public opinion should mix them up in the pretended disorders of which the Abbey had been the theatre, and which the poem either exaggerated or invented? Whatsoever his motive, this friend was not certainly then a John of Bologna for Lord Byron; but the modesty of the poet surpassed the severity of his judge; for, accepting the blame as if it were merited, he restored the poem to its portfolio with such humility that when Mr. Dallas afterwards heard of it almost by chance, and, fired with enthusiasm on reading it, pronounced this extravagant thing to be a sublime *chef-d'œuvre*, he had the greatest difficulty in persuading Lord Byron to make it public.

Gifford's criticisms were always received by Lord Byron not only with docility and modesty but even with gratitude.

He never lost an occasion of blaming himself as a poet and of depreciating his genius. Living only for affection, more than once when he feared that the war going on against him might warp feeling, he was on the point of consigning all he had written to the flames; of destroying for ever every vestige of it; and only the fear of harming his publisher made him at last withdraw the given order.

He knew only how to praise his rivals, and to assist those requiring help or encouragement.

Notwithstanding the favour shown him by the public, it always appeared to him that he would weary it with any new production.

When about to publish the 'Bride of Abydos,' he said, "I know what I risk, and with good reason,—losing the small reputation I have gained by putting the public to this new test; but really I have ceased to attach any importance to that. I write and publish solely for the sake of occupation, to draw my thoughts away from reality, and take refuge in imagination, however dreadful."

In 1814, when Murray (who was thinking of establishing a periodical for bringing out the works of living authors) consulted Lord Byron on the subject, he, whose splendid fame had already thrown all his cotemporaries into the shade, answered simply, that supported by such poets as Scott, Wordsworth, Southey, and many others, the undertaking would of course succeed; and that for his part, he would unite with Hobhouse and Moore so as to furnish occasionally——a failure! and at the same time he made use of the opportunity to praise Campbell and Canning.

His memorandum-book is one perpetual record of his humility, even at a time when the public, of all classes and sexes, had made him their idol.

After having expressed in his memoranda for 1813 his sublime aspirations after glory—that is to say, the happiness he should experience in being *not a ruler, but a guide and benefactor of humanity, a Washington, a Franklin, a Penn;* "but no," added he; "no, I shall never be anything: or rather, I shall always be nothing. The most I can hope is that some one may say of me, '*He might, perhaps,* if he would.'"

The low estimation in which he held his poetical genius, to which he preferred action, amounted almost to a fault; for he forgot that grand and beautiful truths, couched in burning words and lighted up by genius, are also actions. He really seemed to have difficulty in forgiving himself for writing at all. Even at the outset of his literary career he was indignant with his publisher for having taken steps with Gifford which looked like asking for praise.

"It is bad enough to be a scribbler," said he, "without having recourse to such subterfuges for extorting praise or warding off criticism."

"I have never contemplated the prospect," wrote he, in 1819, "of occupying a permanent place in the literature of my country. Those who know me best are aware of that; and they also know that I have been considerably astonished at even the transient success of my works, never having flattered any one person or party, and having expressed opinions which are not those of readers in general. If I could have guessed the high degree of attention

that has been awarded to them, I should certainly have made all possible efforts to merit it. But I have lived abroad, in distant countries, or else in the midst of worldly dissipation in England: circumstances by no means favourable to study and reflection. So that almost all I have written is but passion; for in me (if it is not an Irishism to say so) indifference itself was a *sort of passion*, the result of experience and not the philosophy of nature."

The same contempt, manifested in a thousand ways throughout his life, was again expressed by Lord Byron, a few days before his death, to Lord Harrington, on being told by the latter that, notwithstanding the war he had waged against English prejudices and national susceptibility, he had nevertheless been the pride and even the idol of his country.

"Oh!" exclaimed he, "it would be a stupid race that should adore such an idol. It is true, they laid aside their superstition, as to my divinity, after 'Cain.'"

We find in his memoranda, with regard to a comparison made between himself and Napoleon, these significant words: "I, an *insect*, compared to that creature!" *

Sometimes he ascribes his poetical success to accidental causes, or else to some merit not personal to himself but transmitted by inheritance; that is, to his rank.

The generality of authors, especially poets, love to read their productions over and over again, just as a fine woman likes to admire herself in the glass.

* Moore, vol. i., p. 512.

He, on the contrary, avoided this reflection of his genius, which seemed to displease him.

"Here are two wretched proof-sheets from the printer. I have looked over one; but, on my soul, I cannot read that 'Giaour' again—at least not now and at this hour (midnight); yet there is no moonlight."

He never read his compositions to any one. On inviting Moore to Newstead Abbey, soon after having made his acquaintance, he said, "I can promise you Balnea Vina, and, if you like shooting, a manor of four thousand acres, fire, books, full liberty. H——, I fear, will pester you with verses, but, for my part, I can conclude with Martial, '*nil recitabo tibi;*' and certainly this last promise ought not to be the least tempting for you."

Nevertheless, this was a great moment for a young author, as 'Childe Harold' was then going through the press. He never would speak of his works; and when any translation of them was mentioned to him, they were sure to cause annoyance to him. Several times in Italy he paid large sums to prevent his works from being translated, at the same time not to injure the translator; but while refusing these homages for himself he desired them for others, and with that view praised and assisted them. We have already seen all he did to magnify Moore, as well as others, both friends and rivals. The Gospel says, "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you;" but for him the precept should rather have been reversed thus, "Do for yourself what you would do for others."

In the midst of his matrimonial sufferings, at

the most cruel moments of his existence, he still found time to write and warmly recommend to his publisher works written by Hunt and Coleridge, who afterwards rewarded all his kindness with the most dire ingratitude. And after praising them greatly, he adds, speaking of one of his own works, "And now let us come to the last, my own, of which I am ashamed to speak after the others. Publish it or not, as you like; I don't care a straw about it. If it seems to you that it merits a place in the fourth volume, put it there, or anywhere else; and if not, throw it into the fire." This poem, so despised, was the 'Siege of Corinth'!

About the same time, on learning that Jeffrey had lauded 'Hebrew Melodies'—poems so much above all praise that one might believe them (said a great mind lately *) thought by Isaiah and written by Shakespeare—Lord Byron considered Jeffrey very kind to have been so indulgent.

With what simplicity or contempt does he always introduce his *chefs-d'œuvre*, either by dedication to his friends, or to his publisher.

"I have put in press a devil of a story or tale, called the 'Corsair.' It is of a pirate island, peopled with my own creatures, and you may easily imagine that they will do a host of wicked things, in the course of three cantos."

And this *devil of a story or tale* had numberless editions. Several thousand copies were sold in one day. We have already seen the modest terms in which he announced to his friend Moore the termi-

* The present Dean of Westminster.

nation of his poem 'Manfred.' This is how he mentioned it to his publisher :—

"I forgot to mention to you that a kind of poem in dialogue (in blank verse), or drama, from which the translation is an extract, begun last summer in Switzerland, is finished; it is in three acts, but of a very wild, metaphysical, and inexplicable kind.

"Byron."

He describes to Murray the causes, and adds :—

"You may perceive by this outline that I have no great opinion of this piece of fantasy; but I have at least rendered it *quite impossible* for the stage, for which my intercourse with Drury Lane has given me the greatest contempt.

"I have not even copied it off, and feel too lazy at present to attempt the whole; but when I have, I will send it you, and you may either throw it into the fire or not.

"I have really and truly no notion whether it is good or bad, and as this was not the case with the principal of my former publications, I am, therefore, inclined to rank it very humbly. You will submit it to Mr. Gifford, and to whomsoever you please besides. With regard to the question of copyright (if it ever comes to publication), I do not know whether you would think *three hundred* guineas an overestimate, if you do you may diminish it. I do not think it worth more.

"Byron."*

"Venice, March 9th, 1817.

* Moore, Letter 265.

Lord Byron never protested against or complained of any criticism as to the talent displayed in his works. His protests (much too rare, alas!) never had any other object than to repel some abominable calumny. When they criticised without good faith and without measure his beautiful dramas, saying they were not adapted for the stage, what did he reply?

"It appears that I do not possess dramatic genius."

His observations on that wicked and unmerited article in 'Blackwood's Magazine' for 1819, are quite a *chef-d'œuvre* of reasoning and modesty. There again, if he defends the man a little, he condemns the poet.

His modesty was such that he almost went so far as to see, in the enmity stirred up against him during his latter years, a symptom of the decay of his talent. He really seemed to attach value to his genius only when it could be enlisted in the service of his heart.

In 1821, being at Ravenna, and writing his memoranda, he recalls that one day in London (1814), just as he was stepping into a carriage with Moore (whom he calls with all his heart the poet *par excellence*), he received a Java Gazette, sent by Murray, and that on looking over it, he found a discussion on his merits and those of Moore. And, after some modest amusing sentences, he goes on to say:—

"It was a great fame to be named with Moore; greater to be compared with him; greatest *pleasure*, at least, to be *with* him; and, surely, an odd coincidence, that we should be dining together while they

were quarrelling about us beyond the equinoctial line. Well, the same evening, I met Lawrence the painter, and heard one of Lord Grey's daughters (a fine, tall, spirited-looking girl, with much of the patrician thorough-bred look of her father, which I dote upon) play on the harp, so modestly and ingenuously, that she looked music. Well, I would rather have had my talk with Lawrence (who talked delightfully) and heard the girl, than have had all the fame of Moore and me put together. The only pleasure of fame is that it paves the way to pleasure; and the more intellectual our pleasure, the better for the pleasure and for us too."*

This modesty sometimes even carried him so far as to lead him into most extraordinary appreciation of things. For instance, he almost thought it blamable to have one's own bust done in marble, unless it were for the sake of a friend. Apropos of a young American who came to see him at Ravenna, and who told him he was commissioned by Thorwaldsen to have a copy of his bust made and sent to America, Lord Byron wrote in his journal :—

"*I* would not pay the price of a Thorwaldsen bust for any human head and shoulders, except Napoleon's, or my children's, or some *absurd womankind's*, as Monkbarns calls them, or my sister's. If asked why, then, I sat for my own? Answer, that it was at the particular request of J. C. Hobhouse, Esq., and for no one else. A picture is a different matter; everybody sits for their picture; but a bust looks like putting up *pretensions to permanency*, and smacks

* Moore, vol. v., p. 76.

something of a *hankering for public fame rather than private remembrance*."

Let us add to all these proofs of Lord Byron's modesty, that his great experience of men and things, the doubts inseparable from deep learning, and his indulgence for human weakness, rendered his reason most tolerant in its exigencies, and that he never endeavoured to impose his opinions on others. But while remaining essentially a modest genius, Lord Byron did not, however, ignore his own value. If he had doubted himself, if he had wanted a just measure of confidence in his genius, could he have found in his soul the energy necessary for accomplishing in a few years such a marvellous literary career? His modesty did not proceed from conscious inferiority with regard to others.

Could the intellect that caused him to appreciate others so well fail to make him feel his own great superiority? But that *relative superiority* which he felt in himself left him *perfectly modest*, for he knew it was subject to other relations that showed it to him in extreme littleness: that is to say, the relation of the finite with the aspiration towards the infinite. It was the appreciation of the immense distance existing between what we know and what we ignore, between what we are and what we would be; the consciousness, in fact, of the limits imposed by God on man, and which neither study nor excellence of faculties can ever enable us to pass beyond.

Those rare beings, whose greatness of soul equals their penetration of mind, cannot themselves feel the fascination they exercise over others; and while per-

forming miracles of genius, devotion, and heroism, remain admirably simple, natural, and modest, believing that they do not outstep the humblest limits.

Such was Lord Byron. We may then sum up by saying that he was not only a modest genius, but also that, instead of being too proud of his genius, he may rather be accused of having too little appreciated this great gift, as well as many others bestowed by Heaven.

CHAPTER IV.

VIRTUES OF HIS SOUL.

His Generosity a Virtue.

All that we have hitherto said, proves that Lord Byron's generosity has never been disputed; but the generosity usually attributed to him was an innate quality, the impulse of a good heart, naturally inclined to bestow benefits.

Certainly, to distribute among the poor our superfluities, and very often more than that, to borrow rather than suffer the unfortunate to wait for assistance; to subtract from our pleasures, and even to bear privations, the better to help all the afflicted, without distinction of opinion, age, or sex; to measure the kindness done rather by their wants, than our own resources, and to do all that, without ostentation, habitually, in secret and unknown, with God and our conscience for sole witnesses: certainly, all that is full of moral beauty; and we know on what a large scale Lord Byron practised it all his life. We have seen him in childhood, of which we should vainly seek one more amiable and more admirable, wish to take upon himself the punishments destined for his comrades; rescue their hall from the senseless fury of his schoolfellows, by showing them the dear names of their parents written on the walls; desire to expose himself to death, to save a comrade, who had two parents to regret his loss, while he

himself had only one; and, send his good nurse the first watch of which he became possessed,—and we know what a treasure the first watch is to a child. We have followed him later, a youth at college, at the university, and at Newstead, in his devoted passionate affections; a young man on his travels, and in the midst of the great world, and we have seen his compassion for every kind of misfortune, and his mode of assuaging them.

When we perceive, despite the ardour and mobility of his heart, where so many contrary elements combined, contradicted, jarred against, or succeeded each other, that there never was a single instant in his life when generosity did not reign supreme over every impulse and consideration, not only are we compelled to pronounce him generous, but we are likewise forced to acknowledge that generosity, with a passion for truth, divided the empire of his soul, and formed the two principal features of his character. But if his generosity had ended in only satisfying the fine tendencies of his nature, would it have acquired the right to be called virtuous? We do not think so. For generosity, to merit that sacred epithet, must express sentiments rarer and more elevated, arrive at the highest triumph of moral strength, at the greatest self-abnegation; it must succeed in overcoming appetite, in forgetting the most just resentments, in returning good for evil. Then, alone, can generosity attain that sublime degree which entitles it to be called a virtue.

Did Lord Byron's generosity reach this great moral height? Let us examine facts; they alone can answer.

If a young man lends assistance to a young and beautiful girl, without any interested motive, and with exquisite delicacy, he certainly gives proof that he possesses delicacy of soul. His merit becomes much greater if he acts thus solely to save her honour. But if the young girl, full of gratitude, falls deeply in love with her benefactor; if, unable to hide the impression produced on her heart by his presence and his generosity, she makes him understand that her gratitude would have no limits; and if he, at the age when passion is all awake, though touched by the sentiments this charming person has conceived, nevertheless shuts his senses against all temptations, does not the greatness of his soul then become admirable? Well, this was fully realized in Lord Byron. And not only in a single instance; but often during his life. For, if temptations were numerous, so were victories also. We will only quote one example, with sufficient details to make it justly appreciated.

Miss S——, who had been bred in ease, but who, with her family, had been reduced, through a series of misfortunes, to absolute want, found herself exposed to the greatest evil that can menace a portionless girl. Her mother, whose temper had been soured by reverses which had likewise quite overthrown her sense of morality, had become one of those women who consider poverty the worst of all evils. Unscrupulous as to the means of putting an end to it, she did not think it necessary to fortify her daughter's mind by good counsels. Happily the young girl had lofty sentiments and natural dignity. Secure from vulgar seduction, and guided by whole-

some steady principles, she desired to depend only on her talents for gaining a livelihood, and for assisting her parents. Having written a small volume of poetry, she had already got subscriptions from persons of high position; but her great desire was to obtain Lord Byron's name.

An impulse, often recurring, induced her to apply to the young nobleman, who was then still unmarried. She only knew him through his works, and by report, which already associated with admiration for his talents a thousand calumnies concerning his moral character. The sceptical stanzas of 'Childe Harold' still troubled orthodox repose; the lines on the tears of the Princess Royal irritated the Tories, and his last success with the 'Corsair,' added to those he had already gained, further embittered his jealous rivals. Thus calumnies made up from these different elements besieged the poet's house, so as to prevent truth concerning the man from being known. Even in her family, Miss S—— found hostility against him; for her mother, who called herself a Tory, only discovered moral delicacy when she wished to show her repugnance for the Whig party, to which Lord Byron belonged. Miss S——, in a moment of extreme anguish and pressing embarrassment, resolved upon applying to the young nobleman. He received her with respect and consideration, and soon perceived how intimidated she was by the rather bold step she had taken, and also by the cause that prompted it. Lord Byron reassured her, by treating her with peculiar kindness, as he questioned her respecting her circumstances. When she had related the sad reasons that de-

termined her to ask him for a subscription, Lord Byron rang for his valet, and ordered a desk to be brought him. Then, with that delicacy of heart which formed such a remarkable trait in his character, he wrote down, while still conversing, a few words, which he wrapped up in an envelope, and gave to the young lady. She soon after withdrew, thinking she had obtained the coveted subscription.

When fairly out, all she had seen and heard appeared to her like a dream. The door which had just closed behind her seemed the gate of Eden, opening on a land of exile. Nevertheless, she was to see him again. He had consented to receive her volume. Lord Byron was not for her the angel with the flaming sword, but rather an angel of gentleness, mercy, and love. Never had she seen or imagined such a combination of enchantments; never had she seen so much beauty, nor heard such a voice; never had such a sweet expressive glance met hers. "No;" she repeated to herself, "he is not a man, but some celestial being. *Oh! mamma, Lord Byron is an angel!*" were the first words that escaped her on returning home. The envelope was opened; and a new surprise awaited them. Together with his subscription, she found, wrapped up, fifty pounds. That sum was, indeed, a treasure for her. She fell on her knees with all her family; even her mother forgot for the moment that it was Whig money to which they owed their deliverance, and seemed almost to agree with her eldest daughter, whose enthusiasm communicated itself to the younger one, who never wearied in questioning her sister about Lord Byron's perfections, until the night was far spent.

But if the family was thus relieved, if the young girl's honour was safe, her peace of mind was gone. The contempt and dislike she already felt for several men who were hovering about her with alarming offers of protection, were now further increased by the comparison she was enabled to make between their vulgar and low, basely hypocritical or openly licentious natures, and that of the noble being she had just seen.

Thenceforth Byron's dazzling image never left her mind. It remained fixed there during the day, to reappear at night in her dreams and visions. Such a hold had it gained over her entire being, that Miss S—— seemed from that hour to live heart and soul only in the hope of seeing him again.

When she returned to take him her book, she found that she had to add to all the other charms of this superior being that respect which the wisdom of mature age seems only able to inspire. For he not only spoke to her of what might best suit her position, and disapproved some of her mother's projects, as dangerous for her honour, but even refused to go and see her as she requested; nor would he give her a letter of introduction to the Duke of Devonshire, simply because a handsome girl could not be introduced by a young man without having her reputation compromised.

The more Miss S—— saw of Lord Byron, the more intense her passion for him became. It seemed to her that all to which heart could aspire, all of happiness that heaven could give here below, must be found in the love of such a pre-eminent being. Lord Byron soon perceived the danger of these visits. Miss

S—— was beautiful, witty, and charming; Lord Byron was twenty-six years of age. How many young men, in a similar case, would not without a scruple have thought that he had only to cull this flower which seemed voluntarily to tempt him? Lord Byron never entertained such an idea. Innocent of all intentional seduction, unable to render her happy, even if he could have returned her sentiments, instead of being proud of having inspired them, he was distressed at having done so. He did not wish to prove the source of new misfortunes to this young girl, already so tried by fate, and without guide or counsellor. So he resolved to use all his efforts towards restoring her peace. It would be too long to tell the delicate mode he used to attain this end, the generous stratagems he employed to heal this poor wounded heart. He went so far as to try to appear less amiable. For the sake of destroying any hope, he assumed a cold, stern, troubled air; but on perceiving that he had only aggravated the evil, his kindliness of heart could resist no longer, and he hit on other expedients. Finally he succeeded in making her comprehend the necessity of putting an end to her visits. She left his house having ever been treated with respect, the innocence of their mutual intercourse unstained; and the young man's sacrifice only permitted one kiss imprinted on the lovely brow of her whose strong feelings for himself he well knew.

What this victory, gained by his will and his sentiment as a man of honour over his senses and his heart, cost Lord Byron, has remained his own secret. But those who will imagine themselves in similar

circumstances at the age of twenty-six, may conceive it. As to Miss S——, the excess of her emotions made her ill; and she long hung between life and death. Nevertheless, the strength of youth prevailed and ended by giving her back physical health. But was her mind equally cured? The only light that had brightened her path had gone out, and, plunged in darkness, how did she pursue her course through life? Was her heart henceforth closed to every affection? Or did she chain it down to the fulfilment of some austere duty, that stood her in lieu of happiness? Or, as it sometimes happens to stricken hearts, did a colour, a sound, a breeze, one feature in a face, call up hallucinations, give her vain longings, make her build fresh hopes and prepare for her new deceptions? Proof against all meannesses, but young and most unhappy, was she always able to resist the promptings of a warm, feeling, grateful heart? We are ignorant of all this. We only know of her, that never again in her long career did she meet united in one man that profusion of gifts, physical, intellectual, and moral, that made Lord Byron seem like a being above humanity. She tells it to us herself, in letters written at the distance that separates 1814 from 1864, lately published in French, preceding and accompanying a narrative composed in her own language, in which she has related her impressions of Lord Byron, and given the details of all that took place between her and him. It was a duty, she says, that remained for her to accomplish here below.

Her narrative and these letters are charming from their simplicity and naïveté; what she says bears the stamp of plain truth, her admiration has

nothing high flown in it, and her style is never wanting in the sobriety which ought always to accompany truth, in order to make it penetrate into other minds.

We would fain transcribe these pages, that evidently flow from an elevated and sincerely grateful heart. For they reflect great honour on Lord Byron, since, in showing the strength of the impression made on the young girl, they bring out more fully all the self-denial he must have exercised in regard to her; likewise, because, in her letters, this lady, after so long an experience of life, never ceases proclaiming Lord Byron the handsomest, the most generous, and the best of men she ever knew. But though it is impossible for me to reproduce all she says, still I feel it necessary to quote some passages from her book. In the first letter addressed to Mrs. B——, she says:—

"At the moment of the separation between Lord Byron and that woman who caused the misery of his life, I was not in London; and I was so ill, that I could neither go to see him nor write as I wished. For he had shown me so much goodness and generosity that my heart was bursting with gratitude and sorrow; and never have I had any means of expressing either to him, except through my little offering.* Even now my heart is breaking at the thought of the injustice with which he has been treated.

"His friend Moore, to whom he had confided his memoirs, written with his own hand, had not the courage to fulfil faithfully the desire of his generous

* She had dedicated to him a small collection of poems, which she sent to Pisa, in 1821, with a letter, *to which she received no answer.*

friend. Lady Blessington made a book upon him very profitable *to herself*, but in which she does not always paint Lord Byron *en beau*, and where she has related a thousand things that Lord Byron only meant in joke, and which ought not to have been either written or published. And when it is remembered that this lady (as I am assured) never saw or conversed with Lord Byron but out of doors, when she happened to meet him on horseback, and very rarely (two or three times) when he consented to dine at her house, in both of these cases, in too numerous a company for the conversation to be of an intimate nature; when it is known (as I am further assured) that Lord Byron was so much on his guard with this lady (aware of her being an authoress), that he never accepted an invitation to dine with her, unless when his friend Count Gamba did: truly, we may then conclude that these conversations were materially impossible, and must have been a clever mystification,—a composition got up on the biographies of Lord Byron that had already appeared, on Moore's works, Medwin's, Lord Byron's correspondence, and, above all, on 'Don Juan.' She must have made her choice, without any regard to truth or to Lord Byron's honour; rather selecting such facts, expressions, and observations as allowed her to assume the part of a moral, sensitive woman, to sermonize, by way of gaining favour with the strict set of people in high society, and to be able to bring out her own opinions on a number of things and persons, without fear of compromising herself, since she put them into Lord Byron's mouth.

"Verily these conversations cannot be explained in

any other way. At any rate, I confess this production of her ladyship so displeased me that I threw it aside, unable to read it without ill-humour and disgust. At that time (1814) he was not married; and I beheld in him a young man of the rarest beauty. Superior intellect shone in his countenance; his manners were at once full of simplicity and dignity; his voice was sweet, rich, and melodious. If Lord Byron had defects (and who has not?) he also possessed very great virtues, with a dignity and sincerity of character seldom to be found. The more I have known the world, the more have I rendered homage to Lord Byron's memory."

Miss S—— wrote thus to a person with whom she was not acquainted; but, encouraged by the answer she received, she despatched a second letter, opening her heart still further, and sending some details of her intercourse with Lord Byron,—what she had seen and known of him.

"Ah! madam," she exclaims, "if you knew the happiness, the consolation I feel in writing to you, knowing that all I say of him will be well received, and that you believe all these details so creditable to him!"

In the same letter, she declares "that when he was exposed to the attacks of jealousy and a thousand calumnies spread against him, he always said, 'Do not defend me.'

"But, madam, how can we be silent when we hear such infamous things said against one so incapable of them? I have always said frankly what I thought of him, and defended him in such a way as to carry conviction into the minds of those who heard me.

But a combat between one person and many is not equal, and I have several times been ill with vexation. Never mind; what I can do, I will."

She announced her intention of communicating the whole history of her acquaintance with Lord Byron.

"I am about to commence, madam, the account of my acquaintance with our great and noble poet. I shall write all concerning him in English, because I can thus make use of his own words, which are graven in my heart, as well as all the circumstances relating to him. I will give you these details, madam, in all their simplicity; but their value consists less in the words he made use of, than in the manner accompanying them, in the sweetness of his voice, his delicacy and politeness at the moment when he was granting a favour, rendering me such a great service. Oh! yes, he was really good and generous; never, in all my long years, have I seen a man *worthy to be compared to him*."

She wrote again on the 10th of November, 1864:—

"Here, madam, are the details I promised you about my first interview with Lord Byron. I give them to you in all their simplicity. I make no attempt at style; but simply tell unvarnished truth; for, with regard to Lord Byron, I consider truth the most important thing,—his name is the greatest ornament of the page whereon it is inscribed. I will also send you, madam, if you desire, my second and third interview with this noble, admirable man, who was so *misjudged*. To write this history is a great happiness for me; since I know that, in so

doing, I render him that justice so often denied him by the envious and the wicked.

"His conduct towards me was always so beautiful and noble, that I would fain make it known to the whole world. I think they are beginning to render him the justice that is his due; everywhere now he is quoted—*Byron said this, Byron thought that*—that is what I hear continually, and many persons who formerly spoke against him, now testify in his favour.

"They say we ought not to speak evil of the dead; that is very well, but as this maxim was not observed towards Lord Byron, I also will repeat what I have heard said of his wife—I mean that the blame was hers—that her temper was so bad, her manners so harsh and disagreeable, that no one could endure her society; that she was avaricious, wicked, scolding; that people hated to wait upon her or live near her. How dared this lady to marry a man so distinguished, and then to treat him ill and tyrannically? Truly it is inconceivable. If she were charitable for the poor (as some one has pretended), she certainly wanted Christian charity. And I also am wanting in it perhaps; but, when I think of her, I lose all patience."

On announcing to Mrs. B—— the sequel of her narrative, she says:—

"It contains the history of the two days that passed after my first interview with him whom I ever found the *noblest and most generous* of men, whose memory lives in my heart like a brilliant star amid the dark and gloomy clouds that have often surrounded me in life; it is the single ray of sunshine illumining my remembrances of the past."

Miss S—— had not forgotten a look, a word, not even the material external part of things; and when Mrs. B—— expressed her astonishment at this lively recollection,—

"All that concerned Lord Byron," said she, "has been retained by my heart. I recall his words, gestures, looks, now, as if it had all taken place yesterday. I believe this is owing to his great and beautiful qualities, such a rare assemblage of which I never saw in any other human being.

"There was so much truth in all he said, so much simplicity in all he did, that everything became indelibly engraven on heart and memory."

After having said that Lord Byron gave her the best counsels, and amongst others that of living with her mother ("not knowing," she adds, "to what it would expose me") she continues:—

"You say, madam, there is no cause for astonishment that I so admire and respect Lord Byron. In all he said, or advised, there was so much right reason, goodness and judgment far above his age, that one remained enthralled."

On sending the conclusion of her history to Mrs. B——, she says:—

"You who knew Lord Byron, will not be surprised that I loved him so much. But a woman does not pass through such a trial with impunity. On returning home, I threw myself on my knees and tried to pray, imploring Heaven for strength and patience. But the sound of his voice, his looks, pierced to my very heart, my soul felt torn asunder; I could not even weep. For two years and a half I was no longer myself. A man of high position

offered me his hand. He would have placed me in the first society; but he wished for love, and I could only offer him friendship."

And, finally, when the reception of the concluding part of her narrative was acknowledged, she further added:—

"I am very glad that the history of my heart appears to you a precious document for proving the virtues of one whom I have ever looked upon as the *first of men, as well for his qualities as for his genius.*"

Her last letter ends exactly as did her first:—"*Ah! there never was but one Lord Byron!*" In her narrative, which is quite as natural in style as her letters, no detail of her interviews with Lord Byron has escaped her memory.*

We have already seen how, in a moment of despair, the young girl, full of confidence in Lord Byron, whom she considered as one of the noblest characters that ever existed, thought she might go and ask his protection. A fashionable young man, and still unmarried, the reports current about him might well lead to the belief that his house was not quite the temple of order. She was surprised on knocking timidly at his door, on explaining to the *valet de chambre* who opened it, her great desire to speak to Lord Byron, to see Fletcher listen to her with a civil, compassionate air, that predisposed her in favour of his master.

He conducted her into a small room, where all Lord Byron's servants were assembled, and there

* "All that," says she, "lives in my heart and soul, as if these things had taken place a few weeks ago, instead of so many years." (1864).

also she was greatly surprised at the order and simplicity in the establishment of the young lord.

"I never saw servants more polite and respectful," says she. "Fletcher and the coachman remained standing, only the old housekeeper kept her seat."

Miss S—— had dried her tears when admitted into Lord Byron's presence.

"Surprise and admiration," says she, "were the first emotions I experienced on seeing him. He was only twenty-six years of age, but he looked still younger. I had been told that he was gloomy, severe, and often out of temper: *I saw, on the contrary, a most attractive physiognomy, wearing a look of charming sweetness.*"

Miss S—— soon found cause to appreciate Lord Byron's delicacy. She began by excusing herself for having come to him, saying she had taken this step in consequence of family misfortunes. She remained standing. After some moments of silence, during which Lord Byron appeared to interrogate memory, he said:—

"Pray be seated; I will not hear another word until you are. You appear to have an independent spirit, and this step must have cost you much."

Having already partly seen the results of this interview, we refrain from giving further details here, although they are full of interest on account of the goodness, generosity, and delicacy they reveal.

Miss S—— endeavoured to draw his portrait, but the pencil dropped from her hands:—

"I feel that unless I could portray his look, and

repeat his words as pronounced by him, I could not even do justice to his actions."

She does it, however, in a few bold touches which, on account of their truth, we have quoted in the chapter entitled *Portrait* of Lord Byron.

After having said that it was impossible to see finer eyes, a more beautiful expression of face, manners more graceful, hands more exquisite, or to hear such a tone of voice, she adds :—

"All that formed such an assemblage of seductive qualities, that never before or since have I remarked any man who could be compared to him. What particularly struck me was the serene, gentle dignity of his manner. Lady Blessington says, that she did not find in Lord Byron quite the dignity she had expected; but surely, then, she does not understand what dignity is? Indeed she did not understand Lord Byron at all. With me he was unaffected, amiable, and natural. The hours passed in his society I look upon as the brightest of my life, and even now I think of them with an effusion of gratitude and admiration, rather increased than diminished by time."

Lord Byron saw directly that Miss S—— had a noble nature. It must have been such; it must even have been, so to say, *incorruptible*, since she had been able to preserve her purity of soul and simplicity in the position in which she was, despite her surroundings and with such a mother. Lord Byron, seeing her so unprotected and ill-advised, took an interest in her, and instead of profiting by her isolation, resolved to save her. With virtue superior to his years, he opposed the best counsels to the more than

imprudent projects of a mother who thought only of repairing her fortune by whatever means. Miss S——, attracted towards him with her whole heart and soul, begged her young and noble benefactor to come and see her, if it were only once a month. "I should be so happy, my lord, if you would sometimes grant me the favour of a visit, and guide my life," said she to him.

But Lord Byron had perceived the excited state of feeling in which the young girl was. Besides, he was betrothed, and did not wish to expose her and himself to the consequences. Honour and prudence alike counselled a refusal, and he refused.

"My dear child," answered he, "I cannot. I will tell you my present position, and you will understand that I ought not: I am going to marry."

"At these words," said she, "my heart sunk within me, as if a piece of lead had fallen on my chest. At the same instant I experienced an acute pain in it. It seemed as if a chilly steel had pierced me. A horrible, indescribable sensation shook my whole frame. For some moments I could not possibly articulate a single word. Lord Byron looked at me with an expression full of interest, for indeed I must have changed countenance."

Lord Byron, already aware that his image was graven on this young heart, and might become dangerous to her, then understood still better the silent ravages that love must be making there. He pitied her more than ever, he felt the necessity of refusal and sacrifice, and, from that moment, all struggle between will and desire ceased.

He also refused, after some hesitation, to recommend her to the Duke of Devonshire.

"You are young and pretty," said he, "and that is sufficient to place any man, wishing to serve you, in a false position. You know how the world understands a young man's friendship and interest for a young woman. No; my name must not appear in a recommendation to the duke. Don't think me disobliging, therefore. On the contrary, I wish you to make an appeal to Devonshire, but without naming me; I have told you my reasons for refusing to be openly your advocate."

"Another time," adds she, "I ventured to express the wish of being presented to the future Lady Byron. But he again answered by a refusal. 'Though amiable and unsuspicious,' said he, 'persons about Lady Byron might put jealous suspicions, devoid of foundation, into her head.'"

Thus equally by what he refused her and what he granted her, he proved his great generosity, the elevation of his character, his virtuous abnegation and self-control.

Although Miss S—— was then in a humble and humiliating position, she had received a fine classical and intellectual education from her uncle, who was a professor at Cambridge. Her natural wit, the *naïveté* and sincerity of her ideas, uncontaminated by worldly knowledge, were appreciated by Lord Byron. He understood her worth, despite the difficulties that made virtue of greater merit in her, and notwithstanding appearances that were against her; and he showed interest in her conversation during the different interviews sheobtained from him. He talked

to her of literature, the news of the day; and even had the goodness to read with indulgence and approbation the verses she had composed. One day, among others, she had the happiness of remaining with him till a late hour, and when his carriage was announced, to take him to a *soirée*, he had her conducted home in the same carriage.

"Oh! how delightful that evening was to me," says she. "Lord Byron's abode at the Albany recalled some collegiate dwelling, so perfectly quiet was it, though situated at the West End, the noisiest quarter of the metropolis. His conversation so varied and delightful, the purity of his English, his refined pronunciation, all offered such a contrast even with the most distinguished men I had had the good fortune to meet, that I really learned what happiness was."

These conversations afforded her the opportunity of knowing and admiring him still more. In conversing on literature, she was able to appreciate his modesty by the praises he lavished on the talents of others, and by the slight importance he attached to his own; and also his love of truth when, *à propos* of some book of travels she was praising, he told her that he preferred a simple but true tale of voyages to all the pomp of lies. In speaking about an adventure in high life that was then making a great noise in England, she was able to appreciate his high sentiments of delicacy and honour. When the conversation fell on religion, she had the happiness of hearing him declare he abhorred atheism and unbelief; and when his childhood was touched upon, of hearing him say that it had been pleasant

and happy. Finally, when she asked his advice with regard to her future conduct, he displayed, at twenty-six years of age, the wisdom that seldom comes before the advent of grey hairs. In short, by word and by action, he manifested that nobleness of soul which always unveiled itself to pure open natures, but which closed against artificial ones; and which makes Miss S—— say at the beginning as well as at the end of her account:—"There has been but one Byron on earth: how could I not love him?"

But it is especially on account of the great love she felt for him, on going over it, reflecting, comparing the depth of feelings she had been unable to hide from him, with the conduct of this young man of twenty-six, who drew from duty alone a degree of strength superior to his age and sex, that she expressed herself thus. She can still see his looks of tenderness; she can judge what the struggle was, the combat that was going on in him as soft and stern glances chased each other; at length she sees honour gain the victory, and remain triumphant.

It is this spectacle of such great moral beauty, still before her eyes, that can be so well appreciated after the lapse of long years, and which justifies the words that begin and close her recital by divesting it of all semblance of exaggeration:—"There has been but one Byron!"

When we have known such beings, admiration and love outlive all else. And while the causes that may have led to transient emotions in a long career—an error, a fault—pass away and are forgotten like some beautiful vision, these glorious remem-

brances, these more than human images, tower above, living and radiant, in memory, and even come to visit us in our dreams, sometimes to reproach us with our useless and imprudent doubts, ever to sustain us amid the sadnesses of life; and if the love has been reciprocal, then to console us with the prospect of another life, in that blessed abode where we shall meet again for ever.

After this long narrative, it would be useless and perhaps wearisome for the reader if we quoted many other similar facts in Lord Byron's life. They might differ in circumstances, but would all wear the same moral character.

CHAPTER V.

GENEROSITY A HEROISM.

Pardon, Magnanimity.

It remains for us to examine Lord Byron's generosity under another form. I mean that which, after having passed by different degrees of moral beauty, may reach the highest summit of virtue, and become the greatest triumph of moral strength, because it overcomes the most just resentments, forgives, returns good for evil, and constitutes the very heroism of Christian charity.

Did Lord Byron's generosity really attain such a high degree? To convince ourselves of it, we must again examine his life.

Clemency and forgiveness showed themselves in Lord Byron at all periods of his life. In childhood, in youth, though so passionate, and so sensitive at school and at college, so soon as the first explosion was over, he was ever ready to make peace.

In the poems composed during his boyhood and early youth, he was always the first to forgive. He even forgave his wicked guardian (Lord Carlisle). Although this latter only evinced indifference, or worse, with regard to his ward, Lord Byron dedicated his first poems to him. The noble Earl having further aggravated his faults by behaving in an unjustifiable manner, Lord Byron was of course greatly irritated, since he hurled some satirical lines

at him. But soon after, at the intercession of friends, and especially at that of his sister, he showed himself disposed to forget the faults of his bad guardian with all the clemency inherent to his generous nature. He writes to Rogers, 27th June, 1814:—"Are there any chances or possibility of ending this, and making our peace with Carlisle? I am disposed to do all that is reasonable (or unreasonable) to arrive at it. I would even have done so sooner; but the 'Courier' newspaper, and a thousand disagreeable interpretations, have prevented me."

Afterwards, he further sealed this generous pardon by those fine verses in the third canto of 'Childe Harold,' where he laments the death of Major Howard, Lord Carlisle's son, killed at Waterloo.*

He forgave Miss Chaworth; and in this case also there was great generosity. The history of this boyish love is well known. Even if the name of love should be refused to the feeling entertained by a child of fifteen for a girl of eighteen, who only looked upon him, it is said, as a boy, and liked him as a brother, not only on account of the difference of age, but also because she was already attached to the young man whom she afterwards married, still it cannot be denied that these first awakenings of the heart, though full of illusion, cause great suffering. For if Lord Byron was a child in years, he was already a young man in intellect, soul, imagination, and sensibility. That Miss Chaworth should raise emotion in his heart is very comprehensible, for

* "Their praise is hymn'd by loftier harps than mine,
Yet one I would select from that proud throng,
Partly because they blend me with his line,
And partly that I did his sire some wrong."

every girl has good chances of appearing an angel to youths, whose preference invariably falls on women older than themselves. Besides, Miss Chaworth was placed in quite exceptional circumstances with regard to Lord Byron, such as were well calculated to act powerfully on the imagination of a boy, and render the dispelling of his poetic dream a most painful reality.

Miss Chaworth was heiress of the noble family whose name she bore, and her uncle had been killed in a duel by the last Lord Byron, grand-uncle of the poet. She resided with her family at Annesley, a seat two miles distant from Newstead Abbey. Their two properties touched each other; but the slight barrier separating them was marked with blood. The two children then, despite their near vicinity, only saw each other by chance, or by secretly getting over the boundary of their respective grounds. The chief obstacle to the reconciliation of the two families was the young girl's father. But when Lord Byron reached his fourteenth year, and, according to custom, came from Harrow to pass his holidays at Newstead, Mr. Chaworth was dead, and the mother of the young heiress received him at Annesley with open arms, for she did not partake her husband's feelings, but, on the contrary, looked forward with pleasure to the possibility of a union with her daughter, despite the difference of age between them. The development of their mutual sympathy was equally encouraged by the professors, governesses, and all surrounding the young lady, for they liked young Byron extremely.

From that time he had his room at Annesley, and

was looked upon as one of the family. As to the young lady, she made him the companion of her amusements. In the gardens, parks, on horseback, in all excursions, he was constantly by her side. For him she played, and sang to the piano. What was her love for him? Were there not moments in which she did not look upon him only as a brother, or a child? Did she ever contemplate the possibility of becoming his wife?

Moore does not think so.

"Neither is it, indeed, probable," says he, "had even her affections been disengaged, that Lord Byron would, at this time, have been selected as the object of them. A seniority of two years gives to a girl, 'on the eve of womanhood,' an advance into life with which the boy keeps no proportionate pace. Miss Chaworth looked upon Byron as a mere school-boy. His manners, too, were not yet formed, and his great beauty was still in its promise and not developed."

Galt is still more explicit in the same sense. Washington Irving appears to think the contrary:—

"Was this love returned?" says he. "Byron sometimes speaks as if it had been; at other times he says, on the contrary, that she never gave him reason to believe so. It is, however, probable, that at the commencement her heart experienced at least fluctuations of feeling: she was at a dangerous age. Though a child in years, Lord Byron was already a man in intelligence, a poet in imagination, and possessed of great beauty."

This opinion is the most probable. We may add that everything must have contributed to keep up his illusion. Miss Chaworth gave him her portrait, her

hair, and a ring. Mrs. Chaworth, the governess, all the family of the young heiress liked him so much, that after his death, when Washington Irving visited Annesley, he found proofs of this affection in the welcome given to, and the emotion caused even by the presence of a dog that had belonged to Lord Byron. This beautiful waking dream lasted, however, only the space of a dream in sleep.

At the expiration of his six weeks' holidays, young Byron returned to Harrow.

While he was cherishing the sacred flame with his purest energies of soul, what did she? She had forgotten him! The impression made on her heart by the schoolboy's love could not withstand the test of absence. She gave her heart to another.

"I thought myself a man," says he; "I was in earnest, she was fickle."

It was natural, however. She had arrived at the age when girls become women, and leave their childish loves behind them.

While young Byron was pursuing his studies, Miss Chaworth mixed in society. She met with a young man, named Musters, remarkable for his handsome person, and whose property lay contiguous to her own.

She had perceived him one day from her terrace, galloping towards the park followed by his hounds, the horn sounding in front, and he leading a fox hunt; she had been struck with his manly beauty and graceful carriage. From that day his image seated itself in her remembrance, and probably in her heart. It was under these favourable auspices that he made her acquaintance in society. Soon he

gained her love. And when young Byron at the next vacation saw her again, she was already the willing betrothed of another.

That was still, however, a secret locked up in her heart. Her parents would not have wished this union. She had not then declared her intentions, and Lord Byron could not of course guess them. He was still welcomed at Annesley, and treated as heretofore. The young lady herself, instead of repelling him, continued to accept his attentions. This lasted until one day when Musters was bathing with Byron in a river that ran through the park he perceived a ring which he recognised as having belonged to Miss Chaworth. This discovery, and the scenes it gave rise to, obliged the lady to declare her preference.

The grief this broken illusion caused Lord Byron is shown by some of his early verses, and by the 'Dream,' written at Geneva, while musing how different his fate might have been if he had married Miss Chaworth, instead of Miss Milbank. It might be objected that sorrows, the proof of which rests on poetry, are not very authentic, and that it is not quite certain they really did pass through his heart. One might consider with Galt that this childish sentiment was less a real feeling of love than the phantom of an enthusiastic attachment, quite intellectual in its nature, like others that possessed such power over Lord Byron, since Miss Chaworth was not the sole object of his attention, but divided it with study and passionate friendships. One might say, with Moore, that the poetic description given by Lord Byron of this childish love, ought to serve especially

to show how genius and sentiment may raise the realities of life, and give an immense lustre to the most ordinary events and objects. In short, one might think that Lord Byron perceived all the poetic advantages accruing from the remembrance of a youthful passion, at once innocent, pure, and unhappy; how it would furnish him with a magic tint to enrich his palette, with an inexhaustible fund of sweet, graceful, and pathetic fancies, with delicate, lofty, and noble sentiments, and therefore that he resolved to shut it up in his heart, so as to preserve its freshness amidst the withering atmosphere of the world; and in order to draw thence those exquisite images that so often shed ineffable grace and tenderness over his poems. It may, then, be said that, by maintaining alive in his mind scenes passed at Annesley, which recall the chaste, unhappy loves of Romeo and Juliet, and Lucy, he thereby satisfied an intellectual want of the poet that was quite independent of his heart as a man.

But, nevertheless, all those who can feel the heart's beatings through the veil of poetic language will understand that Lord Byron's verses on Mary Chaworth owe their origin to real grief.

Could it be otherwise? The experience resulting from reflection and comparison, which made him afterwards say, that the perfections of the girl were the creation of his imagination at fifteen, because he found her in reality quite other than angelic;* that she was fickle, and had deceived him. This experience, I say, was wanting to the child. Thus, then, Miss Chaworth was for him at that period the beau

* See Medwin.

ideal of all his young fancy could paint as best and most charming.

At the same time, this love, notwithstanding the difference of age, was not, on his side, the giddy result of too much ardour. It was composed of a thousand circumstances and feelings,—of practical, wise, and generous thoughts. A far-off prospect of happiness heightened all the noble instincts of the boy, and all the ideas of order that belonged to his fine moral nature.

To reunite two noble families,—to efface the stain of blood and hatred through love,—to revive again the ancient splendour of his ancestral halls,—all these thoughts mingled with the idea of his union with Miss Chaworth, and made his heart beat with hope. If there were excess in such hope,—if there were illusion,—the fault lies with the relatives of the young lady and herself, rather than with him. Generosity was on his side alone, because he alone had a right to feel rancour.

"She jilted me," says he in prose, and in verse we read,—

> "She knew she was by him beloved,—she knew,
> For quickly comes such knowledge, that his heart
> Was darken'd with her shadow, and she saw
> That he was wretched."

If, then, it was natural for a girl to prefer a young man of more suitable age, handsome and fashionable, to a boy whose features were yet undeveloped, and whom she treated as a child and a brother; was it quite as natural to flatter him,—load him with caresses,—with those gifts likely to foster illusion and hope,—pledges considered as love tokens? Was it natural that, in order to justify certain

coquetries to her affianced, she should make use of insulting expressions with regard to young Byron? But, on the other hand, would it not have been very natural for him, having heard them, to feel a little rancour against her? Surely she was guilty if she had spoken in jest, and more guilty still if she were in earnest.

And yet what was his conduct? In his poem called the 'Dream,' where he sings this romance of his boyhood, he tells us how he quitted Annesley, after having learned that Miss Chaworth was engaged to Mr. Musters:—

> "He rose, and with a cold and gentle grasp
> He took her hand; a moment o'er his face
> A tablet of unutterable thoughts
> Was traced, and then it faded, as it came;
> He dropped the hand he held, and with slow steps
> Retired, but not as bidding her adieu,
> For they did part with mutual smiles; he pass'd
> From out the massy gate of that old hall,
> And mounting on his steed he went his way;
> And ne'er repass'd that hoary threshold more."

Then he jumped upon his horse, intending to gallop over the distance separating Annesley from Newstead. But when he arrived at the last hill overlooking Annesley, he stopped his horse, and cast a glance of mingled sorrow and tenderness at what he left behind,—the groves, the old house, the lovely one inhabiting there. But then the thought that she could never be his dispelled his reverie, and putting spurs to his horse he set off anew, as if rapid motion could drown reflection. However, instead of the reflections he could not succeed in drowning, *he cast away all rancour.*

When he alludes to her in his early poems it is

always with tenderness and respect.* He contents himself with calling her once, *deceitful girl*, and another time, *a false fair face.*

After an interval of some years, when the boy had become a fine young man, before setting out for the East, he accepted the proffered hospitality of Annesley.

He never ceased to welcome Musters at Newstead, and, lest he should disturb the peace of Mrs. Musters, he had even concealed his agitation on kissing his rival's child. Heretofore she had only seen the boy or youth, now she beheld the young man whose genius and personal attractions lent to each other light and charm.

It was about this time that the bright star of Annesley began to pale. On her brow, formerly so gay, a veil of sadness was overspread. It seemed as if the gardens had lost their charm for her; as if the spreading foliage of Annesley had become dark for her. What caused this change? On seeing again the companion of her childhood, did she contrast her now solitary walks with those of earlier days in his beautiful park, where beside her was the youth who would fain have kissed the ground on which she trod? The sound of that hunting horn, which anon made her thrill with joy, when it announced the approach of her handsome betrothed,

* "In the shade of her bower, I remember the hour
She rewarded those vows with a Tear.
By another possest, may she live ever blest!
Her name still my heart must revere;
With a sigh I resign what I once thought was mine,
And forgive her deceit with a Tear."
'*The Tear*' (October, 1806).

and awakened all the illusions of love,—had it now become to her more discordant and painful by its contrast with the harmonious voice and sweet smile of him whom she had just seen again so changed to his advantage?

It was during his travels in the East that Lord Byron heard of this mysterious melancholy. Given the circumstances, such a report would not have displeased, even if it had not pleased, vulgar, rancorous souls. But it produced quite a contrary effect on him. The feeling of his own worth, doubtless, must and ought to have brought certain ideas to his mind; but they saddened his generous nature, and he experienced a desire to drive them away by saying, "Has she not the husband of her choice, and lovely children to caress her?"

> "What could her grief be?—she had all she loved.
> * * * *
> What could her grief be?—she had loved him not,
> * * * *
> Nor could he be a part of that which prey'd
> Upon her mind—a spectre of the past."

Lord Byron returned from his travels, and by degrees, as he rose in the admiration of England, the melancholy observable in Mrs. Musters deepened.

One day she felt such a longing to see again the companion of her childhood, that she asked for an interview. Could he not desire the meeting? But ought he to grant it? He had had the courage to meet her again when he thought her happy, when sorrow for the past belonged to him alone, when she appeared neither to understand nor to share it. But would his heart be equally strong—would it not yield on seeing

her unhappy?* And yet, what could he then do for her happiness? With the same generosity that induced him always to sacrifice his pleasure to the happiness of others, he listened to his reason, his heart, and the prudent counsels of his sister; he refrained from an interview which could only augment the troubles of that devastated soul, soon to become the "*queen of a fantastic kingdom*" in reason's night. But he ever preserved a tender remembrance of Miss Chaworth, only forgetting the wrong she had done him.†

Lord Byron's conduct had been no less generous towards Mr. Musters, his triumphant rival in the affections of Miss Chaworth. Mr. Musters, though several years older than Lord Byron, was, nevertheless, among his early companions. The parents of this young man resided at their country seat, called Colwick, a few miles distant from Newstead, and Lord Byron often accepted their hospitality. One day the two youths were bathing in the Trent (a river which runs through the grounds of Colwick), when Mr. Musters perceived a ring among Lord Byron's clothes, left on the bank. To see and take possession of it was the affair of a moment. He had

* She had been obliged to separate from her husband, who returned her sacrifices by bad and even brutal treatment.

† "Oh! she was changed
As by the sickness of the soul; her mind
Had wandered from its dwelling, and her eyes
They had not their own lustre, but the look
Which is not of the earth; she was become
The queen of a fantastic realm; her thoughts
Were combinations of disjointed things;
And forms impalpable and unperceived
Of others' sight familiar were to hers.
And this the world calls frenzy."

recognised it as having belonged to Miss Chaworth. Lord Byron claimed it, but Musters would not restore the ring. High words were exchanged. On returning to the house, Musters jumped on a horse and galloped off to ask an explanation from Miss Chaworth, who, being forced to confess that Lord Byron wore the ring with her consent, felt obliged to make amends to Musters by promising to declare immediately her engagement with him. Proud of his success, he returned home and acquainted Lord Byron with Miss Chaworth's determination. Dinner was announced. The family sat down, and soon perceived there was something amiss between the two friends, whose gloomy silence spoke more eloquently than words. Before the end of dinner Lord Byron left the table, unable to endure the provocations of his rival.

The parents of Musters, though completely ignorant of what had caused the quarrel, were uneasy for the consequences. After dinner bitter words were again exchanged between the two young men, and Musters used such coarse, insolent language that Lord Byron could ill restrain his indignation. Anger flashing from his eyes expressed itself as warmly in words. In this frame of mind he retired to his room, and remained long shut up there, while Musters believed he was preparing to leave Colwick that very night. But the magnanimous youth, on reflection, understood that at fifteen he ought not to pretend to carry off the fair prize of seventeen from a man nine years his senior; and that it was not generous to grieve his hosts and hurt the reputation of the lady he loved. Accordingly, he suppressed his sorrow, his pride, his

anger. Instead of returning to Newstead, he made his appearance as usual in the drawing-room, and to the astonishment of his rival, excused himself for having shown anger, and thus failed in politeness to his hosts. Candidly, and with regret, he acknowledged that the excess of his feelings had caused the outburst. From that day forth he gave up all pretensions to Miss Chaworth's love, and, forgiving them both with equal magnanimity, he even continued inviting his rival to Newstead. "But," said he, "now my heart would hate him if he loved her not."

On declaring to Moore, in a letter written from Pisa, that he would still forgive fresh wrongs, Lord Byron made this avowal:—"The truth is, I cannot keep up resentment, however violent may be its explosion."

At all periods of his life, he remained the young man of 1814, saying that he could not go to rest with anger at his heart. In Greece, a few weeks before his glorious death, he gave another proof of it by his conduct towards Colonel Stanhope (afterwards Lord Harrington). They had persuaded Lord Byron that the Colonel was very jealous of his influence, and of the enthusiasm manifested for him. True or not, Lord Byron could not but believe it. The Colonel arrived in Greece (sent by the London committee), for the purpose, it was said, of uniting with Lord Byron, and acting jointly in favour of Greek independence; but in reality, it would have seemed as if he came only to counteract what Byron wished. Their ideas on matters of administration and on political economy, their principles with regard to institutions and means of government, were totally

opposed. Bentham was the Colonel's idol and model, while Lord Byron particularly disliked the moral and social consequences flowing from Bentham's doctrines. Ever straightforward and practical, Lord Byron thought the Greeks ought to begin by gaining their independence, *and that they had better be taught to read before they were made to buy books, and the liberty of the press were given them*. Good and honourable, but fond of systems, the Colonel always wished to begin by the end. Thence resulted long discussions between them, which produced hours of ennui for Lord Byron, and many annoyances, most prejudicial to his health, which was then very delicate. One evening, among others, the Colonel grew so excited, that he told him he believed him to be a friend of the Turks. Lord Byron only answered: "Judge me by my actions." Both appeared angry; the Colonel got up to leave. Lord Byron, who was the offended party, instead of bearing rancour, rose also, and, going straight to the Colonel, said: "Give me your honest hand, and good night." The night would not have passed tranquilly for Lord Byron without this reconciliation.

Among numerous proofs of this generous spirit of forgiveness,—so numerous that choice is difficult—we shall select his behaviour towards a certain Mr. Scott, who, at the time of his separation, had attacked him in a savage, cruel manner,—not only unjustly, but even without any provocation.

"I beg to call particular attention," says Moore, "to the extract about to follow.

"Those who at all remember the peculiar bitterness and violence, with which Mr. Scott had assailed Lord Byron, at a crisis when both his heart and

fame were most vulnerable, will, if I am not mistaken, feel a thrill of pleasurable admiration, in reading these sentences, such as they were penned by Lord Byron, for his own expressions can alone convey any adequate notion, of the proud, generous pleasure that must have been felt in writing them:—

"'Poor Scott is no more! In the exercise of his vocation, he contrived, at last, to make himself the subject of a coroner's inquest. But he died like a brave man, and he lived an able one. I knew him personally, though slightly; although several years my senior, we had been schoolfellows together, at the grammar school of Aberdeen. He did not behave to me quite handsomely, in his capacity of editor, a few years ago, but he was under no obligation to behave otherwise. *The moment was too tempting for many friends, and for all enemies.* At a time when all my relations (save one) fell from me, like leaves from the tree in autumn winds, and my few friends, became still fewer,—when the whole periodical press (I mean the daily and weekly, not the *literary*, press) was let loose against me, in every shape of reproach, with the two strange exceptions (from their usual opposition) of, 'The Courier' and 'The Examiner,'—the paper of which Scott had the direction was neither the last nor the least vituperative. Two years ago, I met him at Venice, when he was bowed in grief, by the loss of his son, and had known, by experience, the bitterness of domestic privation. He was then earnest with me to return to England, and on my telling him, with a smile, that he was once of a different opinion, he replied to me, '*that he, and others, had been greatly misled; and that some pains,*

and rather extraordinary means, had been taken to excite them.' Scott is no more, but there are more than one living who were present at this dialogue. He was a man of very considerable talents and of great acquirements. He had made his way, as a literary character, with high success, and in a few years. Poor fellow! I recollect his joy, at some appointment, which he had obtained, or was to obtain, through Sir James Mackintosh, and which prevented the further extension (unless by a rapid run to Rome) of his travels in Italy. I little thought to what it would conduct him. *Peace be with him! and may all such other faults as are inevitable to humanity be as readily forgiven him, as the little injury which he had done to one who respected his talents and regrets his loss.*

'BYRON.'"

Nor did his magnanimity stop here. After Scott's death, a subscription for his widow was got up, and Lord Byron was requested to contribute ten pounds.

"You may make my subscription for Mr. Scott's widow thirty pounds, instead of the proposed ten," answered he; "but do not put down *my name*. As I mentioned him in the pamphlet, it would look indelicate."

But this refined generosity was only one of the forms which Lord Byron's kindliness took. To act thus, was a necessity for this privileged nature, that could not endure to hate, and loved to pardon. Still, his generosity had not yet entered on the road of great sacrifices. It had not yet reached the highest degree of power over self. It did attain to that, when it led him to comprise in one general pardon

the so-called friends who had abandoned him in his hour of sacrifice, and those bitter enemies who knew no reconciliation, *when he forgave Lady Byron.* Then his generosity merited the name of virtue.

Pusillanimity, which binds with an invisible chain the hearts and tongues of vulgar souls, in unreal exacting society, had carried away some; jealousy of his superiority had rendered others ferocious; and an absolute moral monstrosity—an anomaly in the history of types of female hideousness—had succeeded in showing itself in the light of magnanimity. But false as was this high quality in Lady Byron, so did it shine out in him true and admirable. The position in which Lady Byron had placed him, and where she continued to keep him by her harshness, silence, and strange refusals, was one of those which cause such suffering, that the highest degree of self-control seldom suffices to quiet the promptings of human weakness, and to cause persons of even slight sensibility to preserve moderation. Yet, with his sensibility and the knowledge of his worth, how did he act?—what did he say? I will not speak of his 'Farewell,' of the care he took to shield her from blame by throwing it on others, by taking much too large a share to himself, when in reality his sole fault lay in having married her; because it might be objected that, when he acted thus, he had *not given up the wish of re-union.*

But at Venice, and more especially at Ravenna and Pisa, this project certainly had ceased to exist; the measure of insult was filled up to overflowing. And yet, in one of those days of exasperation which letters from London never failed to produce, and pre-

cisely when he was writing pages on Lady Byron that could scarcely be complimentary, he learned that she had been taken ill. His anger and his pen both fell simultaneously, and he hastened to throw into the fire what he had written. Another time he was told that Lady Byron lived in constant dread of having Ada forcibly taken from her.

"Yes," he replied, "I might claim her in Chancery, without having recourse to any other means; but I would rather be unhappy myself than make Lady Byron so."

And he said this, well knowing how his name was kept from his daughter, like a forbidden thing; and that his picture was hidden from her sight by a curtain.

One day, at Rome, while he was walking amid the ruins of the Forum, treading upon those mighty relics that, to him, breathed language and well-nigh sentiments, that seemed like some magic temple of the past, Lord Byron traced back, in thought, his own career. The meannesses of which he had been, and still was, the victim rose up to view. He allowed his thoughts to wander amid the saddest memories. All the wounds of his still bleeding heart opened afresh. The serenity of the starry sky, the silence of that solemn hour, the ideas of order, peace, and justice, which such a scene ever awakens, contrasted strangely with the material devastation around worked by time. The natural effect of a grand spectacle like this, is to render sadder still those moral ruins accumulated within by the wickedness of man.

Then did his past, so recent still, rise up before

him in all its bitterness. And, taking earth and heaven to witness, he exclaimed :—

"Have I not had to wrestle with my lot?
Have I not suffered things to be forgiven?
Have I not had my brain sear'd, my heart riven,
Hopes sapp'd, name blighted, Life's life lied away?
And only not to desperation driven,
Because not altogether of such clay
As rots into the souls of those whom I survey.

From mighty wrongs to petty perfidy,
Have I not seen what human things could do?
From the loud roar of foaming calumny
To the small whisper of the as paltry few,
And subtler venom of the reptile crew,
The Janus glance of whose significant eye,
Learning to lie with silence, would SEEM *true,*
And without utterance, save the shrug or sigh,
Deal round to happy fools its speechless obloquy."

His spirit stirred with excitement, he invoked the aid of the divinity whose shrine these Roman remains appeared to be—

"O Time! the beautifier of the dead,
Adorner of the ruin, comforter
And only healer when the heart hath bled;
Time! the corrector where our judgments err,
The test of truth, love—sole philosopher,
For all beside are sophists—from thy thrift,
Which never loses though it doth defer—
Time, the avenger! unto thee I lift
My hands, and eyes, and heart, and crave of thee a gift."

And what was this gift? Was it vengeance? No! It was the *repentance* of those who had done and were still doing him wrong; that was the prayer he sent up to heaven, so as not to have worn in vain this iron in his soul, and so that, when his earthly life should cease, his spirit,—

"*Like the remember'd tone of a mute lyre,*
Shall on their soften'd spirits sink, and move,
In hearts all rocky now, the late remorse of love." *

* 'Childe Harold,' Canto IV.

Arrived before the temple of Nemesis,—that dread divinity who has never left unpunished human injustice,—Lord Byron evokes her thus :—

"Dost thou not hear my heart?—Awake! thou shalt, and must."

He feels that the guilty will not escape the vengeance of the goddess, since it is *inevitable;* but, as to him, he will not wreak it. Nemesis shall watch; he will sleep. *He reserves to himself, however, one revenge. Which? Ever the same:—Forgiveness!*

"That curse shall be forgiveness." *

Now, we have seen that his generosity did not recoil from any sacrifice of fortune, repose, affection; we have seen it strong against all privations, all instincts, all interests; in short, we have looked at it under all the aspects that constitute great beauty of soul. There remains only one degree more for him to attain—heroism. But the constant exercise of generosity of soul, in inferior degrees, will give him power to reach that sublime height, and, summing up all in one, arrive at *the crowning sacrifice of his life.*

Already more than once, in Italy, and especially in Romagna, when that peninsula was preparing a grand struggle for independence, Lord Byron had shown himself ready to make any sacrifice, to aid in throwing off Austrian chains. But, owing to subsequent events, his extreme devotedness could not then go beyond the offer made. Two years later it was accepted; an enslaved nation, eager for redemption, asked Lord Byron's assistance towards regaining its liberty. In this sacrifice on his part, no single feature of greatness is wanting. Lord Byron would have

* 'Childe Harold,' Canto IV.

been great, had he sacrificed himself for his country; but how much greater was he in sacrificing himself for a foreign nation, for the general cause of humanity? He would still have remained great, had he been led into this noble sacrifice by his own enthusiasm, by his illusions, by personal hopes. But no illusion, no enthusiasm, impelled him towards Greece; naught save the satisfaction caused in a noble mind by the performance of a great action. He did not even hope to escape ingratitude or to silence calumny; for, although so young, he had already acquired the experience of mature years. He knew Greece, and was well aware what he should find there, in exchange for his repose and for all dear to him in this world. We know what sadness overwhelmed his soul during the last period of his sojourn at Genoa. The struggles he had with his own heart may be imagined, when we reflect, that despite his self-control, he was more than once surprised with tears in his eyes.

When hardly out of port from Genoa, a tempest cast him back. He landed, and resolved on visiting the abode he had left with such anguish the day before. While climbing the hill of Albano, the darkest presentiments took possession of his soul. "Where shall we be this day next year?" said he to Count Gamba, who was walking by his side. Alas! we know that precisely that day next year, his mortal remains were carried through the streets of London, on their way to repose with his ancestors, near Newstead. His sorrow only increased on arriving at the palace. His friends were gone; all within that dwelling was silent, deserted, solitary. He asked to

be left alone; and then shut himself up in his apartments, remaining there for several hours. What was his occupation? What were his thoughts? Through what strange agony did he pass? Who shall tell us, (since he concealed it), of that last struggle between the Man and the Hero?

The sadnesses of great souls are *unspeakable*, almost *superhuman*. They are beyond the scales where we would weigh them. But we know that he understood and tasted the bitterness of this chalice,* without drawing back, without failing to drain it to the last.

Night came, and behold him once more on board the vessel. The tempest roared again, then ceased; but the storm within his soul did not cease. Only when a tear sometimes threatened betrayal, did he hasten to the privacy of his cabin.

We will not give here the narrative of this voyage. These pages, we again repeat, are not a biography, but the picture of a soul.

On arriving at the Ionian Islands, he soon understood that his sacrifice, though not beyond what circumstances demanded, certainly far transcended any hope that could exist of regenerating this fallen race, and constituting a nation worthy to bear the glorious name of Greece. But it mattered not: he had given his word, and he was resolved to remain in the country. He even quitted the asylum afforded by the Ionian Islands, and determined to encounter all dangers, the better to accomplish his mission.

Then he went to Missolonghi. The privations he underwent there, the moral and physical fatigue,

* See his 'Life in Italy.'

the effluvia from the adjoining marshes, and the mode of life he was forced to lead, all combined to affect his naturally good health. He was entreated to leave this unhealthy place, and told that his life depended on it. He felt it and knew it. Already he perceived the spectre of the future, and, at the same time, the image of his beloved Italy floated before his eyes,—all that he had left, and would still find there; he represented to himself the existence he might lead there, quiet and happy, surrounded with love and respect. Still so young, handsome, rich, and almost adored, for whom could life have more value? But, if he left, what would become of Greece? His presence was worth an army to that unhappy country. So, then, he would not desert his post; *he resolved to remain, come what might.* "*No, Tita; no, we will not return to Italy,*" said he sadly to his faithful Venetian follower a few days before he fell ill. *He did remain, and he died.*

By this action, in which he overcame himself, Lord Byron gave one of those rare examples of self-immolation, of virtue, and heroism, which, says a noble mind of our day,* "afford real consolation to the soul, and reflect the greatest honour on the human race."

* M. Janet.

CHAPTER VI.

FAULTS OF LORD BYRON.

AFTER having shown the virtues Lord Byron possessed, it might seem useless to enquire whether he had not the faults whose absence they prove. Still, however, it is well to look at the subject from another point of view, and to offer, so to say, counter-proof. For, in judging him, all rules have been disregarded, not only those of justice and equity, but likewise those of logic. And, as it has been variously asserted of him, that he was constant and inconstant, firm and fickle, guided by principle, yet giving way to every impulse; that he was both chaste and profligate, a sensual man and an anchorite; calumny alone cannot be accused of all these contradictions. We must then seek out conscientiously whether there were not other causes for this *inconsistency*, so as to return back within due bounds, and bring contradiction in accord with truth. It is, of course, beyond dispute that the first cause of the unjust verdicts passed upon him lay in the bad passions stirred up by his success, by the independent language he used, and his contempt for a thousand national prejudices. Nevertheless, as the degree of injustice dealt out towards him was quite extraordinary, it may be asked whether some real defects did not lend specious reason to his enemies, and thus we are forced to confess that he had one great fault, which did powerfully aid their wicked-

ness; it consisted in a species of *cruelty* towards himself, *a positive necessity of calumniating himself.*

Although the origin of this fault or defect must have been principally in the greatness of his soul, it certainly had other secondary and lesser causes, and, in common with many other qualities, it was fatal to his happiness; for men accustomed to exaggerate their own virtues only too readily believed him. This mode of doing harm to and *persecuting* himself, of casting shadows over his brilliant destiny, was so strange and so real, that it is necessary to show to what extent he did it, by collecting some of the numerous testimonies given among those who knew him, before we bring out the real cause of his fault, as well as the effect it had on his happiness and his reputation.

In no hands could his character have been less safe than his own, nor any greater wrong offered to his memory than the substitution of what he affected to be, for what he was.

While yet a student at Cambridge, he wrote a letter to Miss Pigott, full of gaiety and fun, giving as an excuse for his silence the dissipated life he was leading, and which he calls *a wretched chaos of noise and drunkenness, doing nothing but hunt, drink Burgundy, play, intrigue, libertinize.* Then he exclaims:—

"What misery to have nothing else to do but make love and verses, and create enemies for oneself."

But while avowing this misery, he adds that he has *just written* 214 *pages of prose and* 1200 *verses.*

And Moore remarks, in a note annexed to this curious letter:—

"We observe here, as in other parts of his early

letters, that sort of display and boast of *rakishness* which is but too common a folly at this period of life, when the young aspirant to manhood persuades himself that to be profligate is to be manly. Unluckily, this boyish desire to be thought worse than he really was remained with Lord Byron, as did some other failings and foibles, long after the period when, with others, they are past and forgotten; and his mind, indeed, was but beginning to outgrow them when he was snatched away."

When Moore speaks of the letter in which Lord Byron, replying to the praise given by Mr. Dallas, says he did not merit it, and depreciates himself morally in every possible way, Moore adds:—

"Here again, however, we should recollect there must be a considerable share of allowance for the *usual tendency to make the most and the worst of his own obliquities.* There occurs, indeed, in his first letter to Mr. Dallas, an account of this strange ambition, the *very reverse*, it must be allowed, of hypocrisy—which led him to court rather than avoid the reputation of profligacy, and to put, at all times, the worst face on his own character and conduct."

Mr. Dallas, writing for the first time to Lord Byron after having read his early poems, paid him some compliments on the moral beauties and charitable sentiments contained in his verses, remarking that they recalled another noble author, who was not only a poet, an orator, and a distinguished historian, but one of the most vigorous reasoners in England on the truths of that religion of which forgiveness forms the ruling principle, viz., the good and great Lord Lyttelton. Lord Byron answered, depreciating

himself in a literary sense, and calumniating himself morally, by the assertion that he resembled Lord Lyttelton's son—a bad, though talented man—rather than the great author.

Dallas had the good sense to take this appreciation for what it was worth, and asked permission to pay the young nobleman a visit. Lord Byron answered politely that he should be happy to make his acquaintance, but continued to paint himself, especially as regarded his opinions, in the most unfavourable colours. Moore gives the whole of this letter, and then adds:—

"It must be recollected, before we attach any particular importance to the details of his creed, that in addition to the temptation—never easily resisted by him—of displaying his wit, at the expense of his character, he was here addressing a person who, though, no doubt, well meaning, was evidently one of those *officious self-satisfied advisers* whom it was the delight of Lord Byron, at all times, to *astonish* and *mystify*.

"The tricks which, when a boy, he played upon the Nottingham quack, Lavander, were but the first of a long series, with which, through life, he amused himself, at the expense of all the numerous quacks whom his celebrity and sociability drew around him."

In the first satire he gave to the world, and which attracted sympathy for his talent as well as for the justice of his cause, the horror he entertained of hypocrisy already made him speak against himself:—

> "E'en I—least thinking of a thoughtless throng,
> Just skill'd to know the right and choose the wrong."

After having quoted an early poem of Lord

Byron, written in an hour of great depression, and which would seem inspired by momentary madness, Moore makes the following declaration :—

"These concluding lines are of a nature, it must be owned, to awaken more of horror than of interest, were we not prepared, by so many instances of his exaggeration in this respect, not to be startled at any lengths to which the spirit of *self-libelling* would carry him. It seemed as if, with the power of painting fierce and gloomy personages, he had also the ambition to be himself the dark 'sublime he drew,' and that, in his fondness for the delineation of heroic crime, he endeavoured to fancy, where he could not find in his own character, fit subjects for his pencil."

Moore, mentioning another article in his memoranda, where Lord Byron accuses himself of irritability of temperament in his early youth, follows up with this reflection :—

"In all his portraits of himself, the pencil he uses is so dark that the picture of his temperament and his self-attempts, covering as they do with *a dark shadow the shade itself*, must be taken with large allowance for exaggeration."

In another passage of his work, Moore further says :—

"To the perverse fancy he had for falsifying his own character, and even imputing to himself faults the most alien to his nature, I have already frequently adverted. I had another striking instance of it one day at La Mira."

Moore then relates that, on leaving Venice, he went to La Mira to bid Lord Byron farewell. Passing

through the hall, he saw the little Allegra, who had just returned from a walk. Moore made some remark on the beauty of the child, and Byron answered, "Have you any notion—but I suppose you have—of what they call the parental feeling? For myself, I have not the least." And yet, when that child died, in a year or two afterwards, he who had uttered this artificial speech was so overwhelmed by the event, that those who were about him at the time actually trembled for his reason.*

Colonel Stanhope, afterwards Lord Harrington, who knew Lord Byron in Greece, shortly before his death, says:—

"Most men affect a virtuous character; Lord Byron's ambition, on the contrary, seemed to be to make the world believe that he was a sort of *Satan*, though impelled by high sentiments to accomplish great actions. *Happily for his reputation, he possessed another quality that unmasked him completely: he was the most open and most sincere of men, and his nature, inclined to good, ever swayed all his actions.*" †

Mr. Finlay, who knew Lord Byron about the same time, says *that not only he calumniated himself, but that he hid his best sentiments.*

Speaking of the simplicity of his manners, and his repugnance for all *emphasis*:—

"I have always observed," continues Mr. Finlay, "that he adopted a very simple and even monotonous tone, when he had to say anything not quite in the ordinary style of conversation. Whenever he had begun a sentence which showed that the subject interested him, and which contained sublime thought,

* Moore's 'Life,' vol. iv., p. 241. † Parry, 273.

he would check himself suddenly, and come to an end without concluding, either with a smile of indifference or in a careless tone. I thought he had adopted this mode *to hide his real sentiments when he feared lest his tongue should be carried away by his heart;* and often he did so evidently to hide the author or rather the poet. But in satire or clever conversation his genius took full flight." *

And Stanhope further adds:—

"I also have observed that Lord Byron acted in this way. He often liked to hide the noble sentiments that filled his soul, and even tried to turn them into ridicule." †

This was only too true. The spirit of repartee and fun often made him display his intellectual faculties at the expense of his moral nature and his truest sentiments.

Moore says that when Lord Byron went to Ravenna to see Countess G—— again, he wrote to Hoppner, who looked after his affairs, in such a light vein of pleasantry, that it would have been difficult for any one not knowing him thoroughly to conceive the possibility of his expressing himself thus, while under the influence of a passion so sincere:—

"But such is ever the wantonness of the mocking spirit, from which nothing—not even love—remains sacred; and which at last, for want of other food, turns upon self. The same horror, too, of hypocrisy that led Lord Byron to exaggerate his own errors led him also to disguise, under a seemingly heartless ridicule, all those natural and kindly qualities by which they were redeemed."

* Letter from Finlay to Stanhope, Parry, 210. † Parry, 210.

And by way of contrast with the strange lightness of his letter to Hoppner, as well as to do justice to the reality of his passion, Moore then quotes the whole of those beautiful stanzas, called 'The Po,' which Lord Byron wrote while crossing that river on his way from Venice to Ravenna.*.

We might multiply quotations, in order to prove that all those who knew him have more or less remarked this phenomenon. But no one has well determined its principal cause; or else it has been too much confounded with the strange caprices he showed, especially in early youth; for subsequently, says Moore, "*when he saw that the world gravely believed the opinion he had given of himself, he refused any longer to echo it.*"

There is certainly truth in the judgment passed by Moore and others. It cannot be denied that, when as a boy, he boasted of his dissipated life at the university, the chief reason of it lay in the folly common to that period of life, which impels human beings while yet children to seek to appear like men by aping the vices of riper years. It cannot be denied, either, that the pleasure of mystifying suggested his answer to Dallas; that an exaggerated horror of hypocrisy taught his pen a thousand censures of himself beginning with his first satire; that a sort of over-excitement and reaction of imagination gave him, at times, the strange ambition of appearing to be one of those dark, proud heroes he loved to paint for the sake of effect. Moreover, we must not forget that witty turn of mind which his extraordinary perception of the ridiculous, and his facility for seeing the

* Moore, 214, vol. ii., in 4to.

two sides of things, often made him to display at the expense of his better nature, by seeming to mock his truest sentiments, as when he wrote to Hoppner: a psychological phenomenon, of which the cause has been more particularly sought elsewhere. Finally, we may also add that he might have believed he was disarming envy and malice by speaking against himself; and that he was to a certain extent escaping from the effects of those evil passions by throwing them something whereon to feed. Who knows whether he also did not—a little through goodness of heart, and greatly through the tactics that make good politicians complain of the unpleasantnesses attached to their greatness—ascribe to himself imaginary defects, so as to let some compassion, under the form of blame, mix with the malice that hemmed him in on all sides; and whether he did not think it well to make use of this means, as of a shield, to ward off their blows? This sort of generous artifice, which I more than once suspected in him, may serve as long as public favour lasts; but when persecution gets the upper hand,—which is the case sooner or later with all greatness and all virtues—when Envy triumphs by means of calumny, she converts into poison, benefits, virtues, gratitude. Thus, if our hypothesis be correct, Lord Byron would have been cruelly punished for his weakness in allowing that to be believed of him which was not true. Still, all we have observed can only furnish, at best, the secondary and evanescent causes of the moral phenomenon described, and those who would fain penetrate the recesses of Lord Byron's soul must search deeper for explanation. Our idea is, the first cause will be found to lie in some sentiment that

reigned all powerful in his breast. I mean that he placed *his ideal standard too high*, and the influence it exercised over him was manifest *even to his last moments.*

In the severe judgments which he has pronounced upon himself in the first place, on mankind in general, and on some particular individuals, the ideal model of all the intellectual, moral, and physical beauty which he found in the depth of his own mind, shone with divine lustre before his imagination, by the union of faculties imbued with extraordinary energy.

We see, by a thousand traits, that his ideal was formed much earlier than is common with ordinary children. In his first youthful poems it already displayed itself much developed. Ever attracted towards truth, his first desire was to seek after that; and the better to do so, he searched into himself, analyzed what was passing within and without, and finally proclaimed it without any consideration for himself or others.

At Harrow we see him leaving off play to go and sit down alone and meditate on the stone now called *Byron's tomb.*

At Cambridge afterwards, despite the dissipation he shared equally with his comrades, amid games and exercises in which he greatly excelled, we still find him courting meditation under shady trees. On returning to his home, the Abbey, when surrounded with the noise and frolic of boisterous companions, we see him devote himself to study and solitary reflection; finally, during his travels, and after his return, when all England was at his feet, we behold him still and

ever experiencing that imperious *want* of scanning himself, of descending into the depths of his own heart, interrogating his conscience, and very often of writing down in his memorandum books the severe sentences pronounced by that inflexible judge. And, as he could not put away from sight his divine model, he came out from these examinations *humbled, dissatisfied, reproaching and punishing himself for having strayed from it.* For he discovered too many terrestrial elements in all human virtues. For instance, in friendships, though so generous on his side, he found the satisfaction of a personal want, consequently, an egotistical element; the same, and much more strongly, with regard to love. He found something personal in the best instincts, in the passion for glory, in patriotism, even in the sentiment of veneration, since that is an echo of our tastes and personal sympathies. That the high standard of his ideal was the first cause of injustice towards himself, a thousand proofs might be offered. I will choose some only. We read in his memoranda :—

"It has lately been in my power to make two men happy. I am delighted at it, especially as regards the last, for he is excellent. *But I wish there had been a little more sacrifice on my part, and less satisfaction for my self-love in doing that, because then there would have been more merit.*"

Such was this great culprit. He actually felt pleasure in doing good! Another time he was asked to present a petition to Parliament. "I am not in a humour for this business," writes he in the evening journal, where he examined his conscience. He was suffering then from grief, caused by the absence of

a person he loved, and he apostrophises himself in these terms :—"Had —— been here she would have *made* me do it. *There* is a woman who, amid all her fascination, always urged a man to usefulness or glory. Had she remained, she had been my tutelar genius.

"Baldwin is very unfortunate; but, poor fellow, 'I can't get out; I can't get out,' said the starling. *Ah! I am as bad as that dog Sterne, who preferred whining over a dead ass to relieving a living mother. Villain! hypocrite! slave! sycophant! But I am no better. Here I cannot stimulate myself to a speech for the sake of these unfortunates, and three words and half a smile of ——, had she been here to urge it* (*and urge it she infallibly would; at least, she always pressed me on in senatorial duties, and particularly in the cause of weakness*), *would have made me an advocate, if not an orator. Curse on Rochefoucault for being always right!*"

Another time *he also accused himself of selfishness, because he wrote only for amusement!* He was then but twenty-three years of age :—

"To withdraw myself from myself (*oh, that cursed selfishness!*) has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all; and publishing is also the continuance of the same object, by the action it affords to the mind, which else recoils upon itself."

This hard opinion of man's virtue, formed by many moralists, and especially by those who see virtue only in pure disinterested benevolence, was an impulse with Lord Byron rather than the result of reason; and I much doubt whether this craving for

equity and truth were ever practically combined and harmonised with the faculty of benevolence in any one else as it was with Lord Byron, for this combination evidently formed the most striking part of his character. Montaigne himself,—who, if he did not possess as much innate benevolence, had nevertheless the faculty, and even felt the want of entering into his conscience, and examining it, so as to draw forth general notions,—says, "When I examine myself conscientiously, I find that my best sort of goodness has a *vicious tint*."

And he fears that even Plato, in his *brightest virtue*, had he analysed it well, would have found *some human admixture*. And then he sums up by saying, "Man is made up of bits and oddities." *

But these sincere philosophers are few in number, and their maxims can never be popular. For men in general experience rather the want of magnifying than of depreciating themselves, and, instead of taking their best models from an ideal, they choose them from reality, judge characters, compare themselves to other men, and, living like other people, see no guilt in themselves; while Lord Byron, living as they did, discovered in himself weaknesses, reasons for modesty, regret, repentance. If he could have done as they did, he would have been satisfied, and he would either have escaped or vanquished calumny. But he could not and would not, though conscious of the harm thence resulting to himself.

"You censure my life, Harness. When I compare myself with these men, my elders and my betters, I really begin to conceive myself a monument of

* Montaigne, v. iii. p. 87.

prudence,—a walking statue, without feeling or failing; and yet the world in general has given me a proud pre-eminence over them in profligacy. Yet I like the men, and, God knows, ought not to condemn their aberrations; but I own I feel provoked when they dignify all this by the name of love. Romantic attachments for things marketable for a dollar!"

One of his biographers pretends that he rendered himself justice another time, and represents him as saying, speaking of M——:—

"See how well he has got on in the world! He is just as little inclined to commit a bad action as incapable of doing a good one; fear keeps him from the former, and wickedness from the latter. The difference between him and me is that I attack a great many people, and truly, with one or two exceptions, (and note that they are persons of my own sex), I do not hate one; while he says no harm of any one, but hates a great many, if not everybody. Fancy, then, how amusing it would be to see him in the palace of Truth, when he would be thinking he was making the sweetest compliments, while all the time he would be giving vent to the accumulated spite and rancour of years, and then to see the person he had flattered so long listen to his real sentiments for the first time. Oh! that would truly be a comic sight. As to me, I should appear to great advantage in the palace of Truth, for while I should be thinking to vex friends and enemies with harsh speeches, I should be saying pretty things on the contrary; for at bottom, *I have no malice or ill-nature,—at least, not of that kind which lasts more than a moment.*"

"Never," adds the biographer, "was a truer observation made. Lord Byron's nature is *very fine*, despite all the bad weeds that might have attempted to spring up in it; and I am convinced that it is the excellence of the poet, or rather the effect of such excellence, which has caused the faults of the man.

"The severity of censure lavished on the man has increased in proportion to the admiration excited by the poet, and often with the greatest injustice. The world offered up incense to the poet, while heaping ashes on the head of the man. He was indignant at such usage, and wounded pride avenged itself by painting himself in the darkest colours, as if to give a deeper hue than even his enemies had done; all the time forcing them to admiration for his genius, as boundless as was their disapprobation of his supposed character." *

Is this conversation real or imaginary? Doubt is allowable; but, however it may be, the reflections of the biographer in this case are too sensible and too true for us not to quote them with pleasure.

In concluding these remarks, which prove how high was the ideal type that impelled Lord Byron to be unjust to himself, I will further observe, that it was the exaggeration of his great characteristic faculties which made him fail in some little virtue (such as prudence, when it has its source *solely in our personal interest*). For it was only to this degree, and from this point of view, that Lord Byron lacked it. And it appears singular that his great mind should not have made him see, in this very craving after self-

* 'Journal of Conversation,' p. 195.

examination, caused by his inclination for truth, and in that extraordinary susceptibility of conscience which led to self-reproach for egotism, only because he *felt pleasure in exercising beneficence, and that it did not contain enough sacrifice*; it is singular, I say, that this same spirit of equity did not make him see how he shone in the only two faculties that can have no alloy of egotism, and which were very evidently the most *striking qualities of his character*. But he was, with regard to himself, like the torch which, lighting up distant objects, leaves those near it in obscurity. Lord Byron did not know himself; he had by no means overcome that difficulty which the oracles of Greece pronounced *the greatest*. Only he was sometimes conscious of it. In his memoranda, written at Ravenna, in 1821, after having said that he does not think the world judges him well, he adds:—

"I have seen myself compared, personally or poetically, in English, French, German (as interpreted to me), Italian and Portuguese, within these nine years, to Rousseau, Goethe, Young, Aretin, Timon of Athens, Dante, Petrarch, an Alabaster Vase lighted up within, Satan, Shakspeare, Bonaparte, Tiberius, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Harlequin the clown, Sternhold and Hopkins, to the Phantasmagoria, to Henry the Eighth, to Chenier, to Mirabeau, to Young, R. Dallas (the schoolboy), to Michael Angelo, to Raphael, to a *petit maître*, to Diogenes, to Childe Harold, to Lara, to the Count in 'Beppo,' to Milton, to Pope, to Dryden, to Burns, to Savage, to Chatterton, to 'oft have I heard of thee, my Lord Biron,' in Shakespeare, to Churchill the poet, to Kean the

actor, to Alfieri, &c., &c. The object of so many contradictory comparisons must probably be like something different from them all; but what *that* is is more than I know, or anybody else."

But had he known himself, he would have found that he realized one of the finest types of character that humanity can offer; for his two characteristic faculties were, his attraction towards truth and benevolence. And in ceasing to calumniate himself, he would have snatched from the hands of the envious and the enemies of truth, the principal weapon they made use of to defame him.

When one reflects on all this, one questions with astonishment how it is that all his biographers should have remained outside of truth. But it is useless insisting thereupon, for we have given sufficient answer.*

I will, then, confine myself to remarking here that one characteristic peculiar to the biographers of great men in general, is the extreme repugnance they feel towards praising their own subjects. What is the cause? Do they fear being told they have made a panegyric, passing for flatterers, appearing to get through a task? Do they believe that, in order to show cleverness, perspicacity, and deep knowledge of the human heart, it is necessary to put in place of simple truth a sort of malice, not very intelligible, and often contradictory? All that may well be, but I believe that what they especially feel is, that if their books were only written for noble minds, possessing such qualities as only belong to the minority of

* See chapter on Lord Byron's biographers.

the human race, they might run the risk of being less sought after and less bought. Thus they search for faults with ardour, just as miners do for diamonds; and when they think they have discovered a vice in their hero, they look upon it as the "Mogul" of their book. They make it shine, polish it up, show it in a thousand lights, bring it out as the striking part of their work,—the chief quality of their hero, who, unable to defend himself, is handed down, disfigured, to posterity. Such are the strange perils incurred, as regards truth and justice, and the wrong done towards the great departed; and this is why their surviving friends are called on to protest against the false assertions of biographers. Those who have written on Lord Byron, unable to find this great "Mogul" (for Lord Byron had no vices), have all, more or less, sought at least to draw the attention of their readers to a thousand little weaknesses, mostly devoid of reality. Upon what basis, indeed, do they rest?—Almost always on Lord Byron's words. Now we know what account should be made of his testimony when he speaks against himself. For instance, he has called himself irritable and prone to anger, and biographers have found it very convenient to paint him with his own brush. Men never fail to treat those who depreciate themselves with equal injustice. Nor is this surprising. If it be true that we are always judged on our faulty side, even though we endeavour to show the best, what must be the case if our efforts tend only to display our worst? And besides, why should others give themselves the trouble of exonerating a man from blame who depreciated himself? As it requires great discernment, great

generosity, and very rare qualities, not to go beyond truth in self-esteem, biographers have not hesitated to declare Lord Byron, on his own testimony, *very irritable*, and even very passionate; but was he really so? This is a question to be examined.

CHAPTER VII.

IRRITABILITY OF LORD BYRON.

WAS Lord Byron irritable? With his poetic temperament, his exquisite and almost morbid sensibility, so grievously tried by circumstances, it would be equally absurd and untrue to pretend that he was as impassible as a stoic, or phlegmatic as some good citizen who vegetates rather than lives. Did such qualities, or rather faults,—for they betoken a cold nature,—ever belong to Milton, Dante, Alfieri, and those master-spirits whose strength of passion, combined with force of intellect, have merited for them the rank of geniuses?

All more or less were, and could not fail to have been, susceptible of irritation and anger; for such susceptibility was indispensable in the peculiar constitution of their minds. But he who finds sufficient strength of will to control himself, when over-excitement is caused by some wounded feeling, does not that person approach to virtue? Did Lord Byron possess this power? Everything, even to the testimony of his servants, his masters, his comrades, proves that he did. In childhood he showed that he knew how to conquer himself, and would use his power. He says, himself, that his anger was of a silent nature, and made him grow pale. Now, is not pale and silent anger of the kind that is overcome? We know that Lord Byron's mother, while still young,

suffered so cruelly from the simultaneous loss of her fortune and a husband she adored, that her temper became changed and embittered. She gave way to violent bursts of passion, quite at variance with her excellent qualities of heart; thus she loved her son, but being very jealous of his affection, a trifle sufficed to make her launch out into reproaches and disagreeable scenes. This disposition on her part was not calculated to inspire the tenderness which her passionate fondness for him would otherwise have merited. But it was his disapprobation of such scenes that taught him to overcome in himself all outward tokens of anger, and to keep guard over his temper. Thus he opposed to the violence displayed by his poor mother a calm and silent demeanour that provoked her still more, it is true, but which proved great strength of will in him. After a violent scene that took place with her during one of his Cambridge vacations, he even determined on leaving home.

"It was very seldom," says Moore, "that he allowed himself to be so far provoked by her as to come out of his passivity."

And by what he himself declares in his memoranda, written at the age of twenty-two, we see that he did not permit any external demonstration of his temper, and that under this discipline it certainly had already improved. "It is especially when I wish to keep silence, and when I feel my cheeks and brow grow pale," says he, "that it becomes very difficult for me to control myself; but the presence of a woman, though not of all women, suffices to calm me."

To proceed with justice in any psychological study,

we should never lose sight of the particular circumstances of the subject under treatment. Now, the circumstances amid which Lord Byron's moral and social life first began to unfold itself were very irritating.

While yet a boy, we see his heart expand to love, to tenderness, excited by the way in which the young lady received his attentions, by the gift she made him of her portrait, by meetings, by the encouragement her parents afforded; for, notwithstanding the disproportion of age, they looked favourably on a union that was equal with regard to fortune and position. And while he was thus beguiled, this girl —whom he considered an angel—deemed the timid youth too childish, and entered into a union with a man of fashion.

On the eve of a long farewell to England, a friend whom he loved with all the devotedness that belonged to a heart like his, showed the utmost indifference at his departure. Having attained his majority, he ought to have taken his seat in the House of Peers; but his noble guardian, Lord Carlisle, whom he had always treated with respect, and to whom he had lately shown the attention of dedicating his early poems to him, behaved towards him in an unjustifiable manner. Not only did he refuse to present him to the House of Lords, but he even delayed sending the documents necessary for his admission, because forsooth the noble Earl *did not like his ward's mother!* Lord Byron had published a charming collection of poems that won for him equal applause and sympathy; but an all-powerful Review sought to humiliate him and crush his talent in the bud by

bringing out a brutal and stupid article against him. Nor was this all; he had likewise the annoyance of money embarrassments inherited from his predecessors in the estate. Leaving England under the sting of all these insults from men and fate, which a phlegmatic temper could alone have borne with patience, would it have been astonishing if his young heart had felt irritation? But could it have existed without being perceived by those who lived with him? Yet they say nothing about it. His fellow-traveller was a friend and comrade of old,—Lord Broughton, then the Hon. Mr. Hobhouse. If Lord Byron had been of an irritable, violent temper, who more than his daily companion would have perceived it, and suffered from it in that constant intercourse which tries the gentlest natures? Mr. Hobhouse had lived with Lord Byron at Cambridge, was one of his inseparable companions of Newstead, and was a member of the confraternity of the Chapter. Thus he knew him well, and if Lord Byron's temper had been unamiable, would he have undertaken such a long journey with him? Lord Byron did not then possess even the prestige of celebrity to render him desirable as a fellow-traveller. Well, on returning from this journey, Mr. Hobhouse was more attached than ever to Lord Byron, and, speaking of his qualities, expressed himself thus:—"To perspicacity of observation and ingenious remarks, Lord Byron united that gaiety and good humour which keeps attention alive under the pressure of fatigue, smoothing all difficulties and dangers."

Journeys taken together test tempers so much, that a good understanding which has withstood the trial of

twenty years, is often compromised in a journey of twenty-four hours. Thus, to choose again for our travelling-companions those with whom we have already long journeyed, is the best testimony that can be rendered to their amiable disposition. Well, this testimony was given by Mr. Hobhouse; and while proving Lord Byron's excellent temper, it also proves the high character of Mr. Hobhouse. For we must not forget that malice and stupidity were inflicting a real persecution on Lord Byron at the very moment when Mr. Hobhouse hastened to rejoin him at Geneva, so as to travel again in company with his noble friend. They accomplished together an excursion into the Alps, and afterwards crossed over them to visit Italy. On arriving at Venice, the two friends separated for several months; but in the spring they met again to visit together Rome and Florence. It was beside Mr. Hobhouse, while scaling the Alps, that the plan of 'Manfred' was conceived; and it was on the road from Venice to Rome that the fourth canto of 'Childe Harold' was written: it is dedicated to Mr. Hobhouse, and he it was who made the volume of notes, which forms, even independently of the text, a work so well appreciated in England.

Having gathered from Lord Byron's first journey proofs of his good natural disposition, and of the control he exercised over himself, I shall also draw others from his last: that journey from Cephalonia to Missolonghi which proved so fatal, and which alone, from all Lord Byron did, said, and wrote during the time it lasted, would suffice to reveal his fine character, and almost every one of his virtues.

It is well known, that during this journey he underwent still greater annoyances than in the one from Genoa to Cephalonia, which had already tried him so much. On seeing both destiny and the elements so pertinaciously combine against its success, one might really be tempted to embrace superstitious ideas, and see therein the efforts of his good genius raising up all sorts of obstacles in order to save him, and keep him from that fatal shore. I have already given the description of this journey so full of dramatic incidents; and I have related Lord Byron's admirable conduct throughout, in the passages where proofs are adduced of his courage in danger, of his extraordinary coolness and extreme generosity. But that is not enough; we must also examine him with regard to amiability of temper and the self-control he was able to exercise.

We have seen him, when pressed on all sides to quit the Ionian Islands for the continent of Greece, yield to these entreaties, although it was the most severe season of the year (28th December), and, notwithstanding a stormy sea, set out for Missolonghi.

He refused the honour of an escort of Greek vessels, hiring instead a Cephalonian *Mistico*, and a heavy *Bombarda* that waited for him at St. Euphemia. But on arriving near the harbour, he was driven back by contrary winds. Forced to remain on shore and wait, what sort of humour did he display under these annoyances? Mr. Kennedy, who went to wish him a pleasant journey, shall tell us.

"I found him," says he, "quietly reading 'Quentin Durward,' and, as usual, in high spirits."

Meanwhile, the sea grew calm. They set sail, and

embarked; Lord Byron on the little *Mistico*, with his doctor, two or three servants, and his dogs; Count Gamba on the *Bombarda*, with the arms, horses, followers, baggage, papers, money, &c. On arriving at Zante, persons came to offer Lord Byron means of amusement, various comforts, &c. To accept might have been very pleasant for him; but he knew that he was wanted at Missolonghi; and not an hour would he lose after having transacted business with his bankers. He believed (for it had been announced) that Greek vessels were coming to meet him; nor did he doubt that the Turkish fleet was still anchored at Lepanto. Sea and wind were favourable, the sky serene, fortune for once seemed to smile; but it was only the better to deceive him. The Turks had been informed of his departure; and hoped to make an easy prey of him and his riches. They left the waters of Lepanto, and heading their course towards Patras, set off in pursuit of Lord Byron and his suite.

At the close of a few hours, the *Mistico*, which was a good sailer, lost sight of the *Bombarda*, of slower motion. They halted opposite the Scrophes (rocks in Roumelia), to wait for it; and meanwhile Lord Byron saw a large vessel bearing down upon him. Could it be the Greek vessel sent to meet him? The *Mistico* fired a pistol at its approach, but the vessel did not answer fire. Was it the enemy, then? On hearing the cries of the sailors on board, the captain could no longer doubt it: it was an Ottoman frigate, calling on them to surrender. Their sole hope of safety lay in the swiftness of their sails. Under cover of the darkness, which left the Turks in fear

lest the *Mistico* should be a fire-ship, and aided by the almost miraculous silence that reigned,—for even the dogs, that had been barking all night, now held their peace,—the *Mistico* sped onwards rapidly. At dawn of day it had arrived opposite the coast, but, owing to a contrary wind, was unable to get into port. At the same moment, another Turkish vessel, on the watch, closed the passage towards the Gulf. An Ionian boat perceived the danger, and made signals from the shore for the *Mistico* not to approach. They then succeeded, all sails set, in throwing themselves between the rocks of Roumelia, called Scrophes, where the Turkish vessel could not penetrate. It was amid these rocks, where he hardly remained an hour, that Lord Byron wrote Colonel Stanhope a letter, truly admirable for its generosity, patience, courage, coolness, and good temper; a letter which it would seem impossible to pen under such circumstances, and which makes Count Gamba say, when he quotes it in his work entitled 'Last Voyage of Lord Byron in Greece:'—

"Such was Lord Byron's style in the midst of great dangers. There was always immense gaiety in him, under circumstances that render other men serious and full of care. This disposition of mind gave him an air of frankness and sincerity, quite irresistible, even with persons previously less well disposed towards him."

Having hardly, and as if by a miracle, escaped from this danger, and being exposed every instant to assault from the Turks, having seen the *Bombarda* captured by the Ottoman frigate, did he complain of anything personal to himself? No. His sole anxiety

was for Count Gamba; his uneasiness was the danger to which the Greeks with him were exposed. As to his money losses—"*Never mind*," said he, "*don't think about it, we have some left.* But we have no arms, except two carabines and some pistols; and if our friends, the Turks, took a fancy to send their vessels to attack us, I greatly fear that we should only be four on board to defend ourselves."

Not being able to know that the *unexpected apparition* of the Turkish fleet had put out all their calculations, and prevented the Greek Government from collecting the vessels sent from Missolonghi to meet him; not knowing that Missolonghi, in great consternation, on learning the danger to which he was exposed, was about to send other vessels in quest of him, other vessels that would no longer find him near the Scrophes rocks, he necessarily believed that nothing had been done to keep the promises made him. Under such a persuasion, would not some few harsh words have been most natural? And yet this is the language Lord Byron used :—

"But where has it gone to; the fleet that lets us advance without giving the least sign of any Moslems in these latitudes? Present my respects to Mavrocordato, and tell him I am here at his disposal. I am ill at ease here (among the rocks), not so much for myself, as for the Greek child with me; for you know what his destiny would be! We are all in good health."

The *Mistico* had hardly been an hour among these rocks, Lord Byron's letter to Colonel Stanhope was hardly finished, when the Turkish vessel on the look-out, made towards them to give chase; and they

were obliged to fly without delay. Issuing from the rocks, they directed their course, full sail, towards a little port of Acarnania, called Dragomestri, where they arrived before night.

Lord Byron wished to continue his route by land; but it was impossible. The mountains did not afford him better hospitality than the sea. It was the 1st of January; his sole resting-place was the damp deck of the *Mistico*. There he slept, there he eat the coarse sailors' food; and his fingers were so cramped with cold, that he could scarcely write. If he had complained a little of his hard fate, could one be much astonished? Yet these are the terms in which he wrote to his two correspondents at Cephalonia.—*It was the month of January; he wished every one a happy new year; apparently forgetting only himself. He then entered into some details about his 'Odyssey' with so much calmness, that nothing seemed to touch him personally; but his heart protested meanwhile, and he could not help showing uneasiness about the fate of his friend Count Gamba, although persuaded that his detention was only temporary:—*

"I regret the detention of Gamba, &c., but the rest we can make up again, so tell Hancock to set my bills into cash as soon as possible, and Corgialegno to prepare the remainder of my credit with Messrs. Webb, to be turned into money. We are here for the *fifth day without taking our clothes off, and sleeping on deck in all weathers, but are all very well, and in good spirits.* I shall remain here, unless something extraordinary occurs, till Mavrocordato sends, and then go on, and act according to circumstances. My respects to the two colonels, and remembrances to all friends. Tell

*Ultima Analise** that his friend Raids did not make his appearance with the brig, though I think that he might as well have spoken with us in or off Zante, to give us a gentle hint of what we had to expect. Excuse my scrawl, on account of the pen and the frosty morning at daybreak.

"BYRON."

He writes at the same time to Hancock :—

"Here we are—the *Bombarda* taken—or at least missing, with all the Committee stores, my friend Gamba, the horses, negro, bull-dog, steward, and domestics, with all our implements of peace and war—also 8000 dollars; but whether she will be a lawful prize or no, is for the decision of the governor of the Seven Islands. We are in good condition, considering wind and weather, being hunted by the Turks, and the difficulty of sleeping on deck ; we are in tolerable seasoning for the country and circumstances. But I foresee that we shall have occasion for all the cash I can muster at Zante and elsewhere. Tell our friends to keep up their spirits—and we may yet do well. I hope that Gamba's detention will only be temporary. As for the effects and money, if we have them, well ; if otherwise, patience! I disembarked the boy and another Greek, who were in most terrible alarm. As for me and mine, we must stick to our goods. I wish you a happy new year ; and all our friends the same.

"Yours,

"BYRON."

* Count Delladecima, to whom he gives this name in consequence of a habit which that gentleman had of using the phrase "in ultima analise" frequently in conversation.

Would an impatient, irritable temper have acted thus, and preserved such serenity amid so many annoyances, privations, and sufferings, of which one alone might suffice to make a stoic bitter?

But this was not yet all. After six days of this life, hopeless of being able to continue by land, and getting no answer from Missolonghi (from whence, nevertheless, several gunboats had been despatched to meet him, and also the brig 'Leonidas,' which he only fell in with near the Scrophes), he resolved on setting out. But the wind, which had never ceased being contrary, soon changed into a furious tempest. Then Byron was truly sublime. His bark was thrown against enormous rocks; the affrighted sailors, seeing their lives in danger, and excited by fear, abandoned the vessel to seek refuge on the rocks. But he remained there, on board the vessel, which every one saw was sinking.*

Encouraged by such an example, the sailors let go their hold on the rocks to try and free the vessel, which they succeeded in setting afloat again; but it was only for it to be forced back a second time by the angry waves. Then despair seized on them all; they trembled for the general safety, and for the illustrious personage on board. He alone showed no emotion; but calmly said to his doctor, who, in great alarm was about to swim for the shore: "Do not leave the vessel while we have sufficient strength to guide her; only when the water covers us entirely, then throw yourself into the sea, and I will undertake to save you."

And in the midst of those dangers he not only

* See the account given by Mr. Bruno, his physician.

appeared calm, but his gay, playful humour, and his habit of observing the different aspects of everything, did not abandon him. After having soothed and consoled those around him, he likewise found means of amusement in the strong traits of individuality which fear brought to light among his followers. The sailors who had remained on board, seeing the danger become so imminent, were about to betake themselves, like the rest, to the rocks; but encouraged by Lord Byron's words and example, they remained at their post, and succeeded in bringing the vessel between two little islands, where they cast anchor. Thus Lord Byron, by his courage, firmness, and his great experience in the art of navigation, overcame this great peril, saving several lives, together with the money and other means of assistance he was conveying to Greece! The sailors esteemed themselves happy to be able to cast anchor between these islands, or rather these rocks, in order to pass the night; but even what appeared fortunate, was destined to turn out the reverse in this fatal journey.

If Lord Byron did not complain of the privation and ennui he experienced, he did not, therefore, feel them less. After so many nights passed on the damp and dirty deck of his *Mistico*, he could not resist the desire of refreshing himself, and seeking amid the waves that cleanliness which was an imperative want for his refined nature. And so, without reflecting on the rigour of the season (it was the month of January), he plunged into the troubled sea, and swam there for half-an-hour. Imprudence no less fatal to him than to Alexander.* For it was

* Alexander the Great imprudently bathed in the Cydnus, &c.

then, undoubtedly, that he contracted the seeds of the malady which showed itself soon after, and under which he succumbed. At last he arrived at Missolonghi, without having ceased for one instant to be threatened by the sea. He was expected there as if he had been the Messiah, says Stanhope; and the consternation caused by the dangers he had gone through, gave place, on his arrival, to the most lively joy. Lord Byron met with a reception worthy of himself.* But this enthusiastic joy, which found expression in songs as well as tears, subjected his patience and good-nature to another sort of trial.

"After eight days of such fatigue," says Count Gamba, "he had scarcely time to refresh himself, and converse with Mavrocordato, and his friends and countrymen, before he was assailed by the tumultuous visits of the primates and chiefs. These latter, not content with coming all together, each had a suite of twenty or thirty, and not unfrequently, fifty soldiers! It was difficult to make them understand that he had fixed certain hours to receive them. Their visits began at seven in the morning, and the greater part of them were without any object." This is one of the most insupportable annoyances to which a man of influence and consideration is exposed in the East.

"*I saw Lord Byron bear all this with the greatest patience.*" Could an irritable temper have done so? For my part, I think that this journey alone, borne, as we have seen, by his letters and the unanimous testimony of his companions, with such perfect good humour, that he could jest, be quite resigned to unavoidable evils, show indulgence to the faults of

* 'Life in Italy.' See how he was received at Missolonghi.

others, however great the sufferings entailed thereby on himself; and display great self-denial, strength of mind, and imperturbable serenity, amid frightful dangers; all these qualities, I say, paint the moral nature of the man better than all analyses and commentaries.

But alas! while displaying his virtues, this journey also brings out his faults: since, prudent in behalf of others, he was not at all so for himself; and his want of prudence planted in him the germs of the disease which was so soon to be fatally developed in that stifling atmosphere of Greece, then full of tumult and confusion. If the limits of this chapter allowed, we could multiply proofs of his naturally amiable disposition at all periods of his life; and we would show what he was in Switzerland, at Venice, Ravenna, Pisa, Genoa, and in Greece, up to his last hour, as he has been described by Shelley, Hoppner, M. de G——, Medwin, Lady B——, and so many others. But to those who have said he was irritable because, feeling himself susceptible of irritation and anger, he declared himself to be so, I will content myself with answering simply by a few lines borrowed from the truthful conversations of Mr. Kennedy:—

"Even during his last days on earth, he calumniated himself. For instance, he told me, that at a certain hour, every evening, he had intolerable fits of ill humour. Well, Mr. Finlay and M—— always went to see him precisely at that fatal hour, and they invariably found him gay, pleasant, and amiable, as usual."

Mr. Finlay, a young English officer of merit and high intelligence, whom Lord Byron thought very

like Shelley, which, perhaps, increased his sympathy for him, and who only knew him two months before his death, says, in a letter written on Lord Byron to Colonel Stanhope :—

"What astonished me most was the indifference with which Lord Byron spoke to us of all the lying reports his enemies spread against him. He gave his vindication and explanation with as much calm frankness as if it had concerned another person."

And he declares his astonishment at seeing him submit to the lessons of morality, and the censures on his opinions and principles which Kennedy, in his extreme orthodoxy, made him undergo.*

I will also add, that Lord Byron was often heard to say that he had been in a frightful rage with his servants; but, if they were questioned, *they knew nothing at all about it.* It is known, moreover, that his toleration and gentleness with them almost exceeded due bounds, and that, even when he had serious cause for chiding them, his severest reprimands were conveyed in jests and pleasantries.

Persons who will not change their convictions, go so far as to say,—"Well, be it so. We admit that he may have been calumniated in his private life, and that his strange fancy of speaking against himself may have contributed towards it. But how do you explain the anger expressed by his pen? Do you forget his misanthropical invectives, his personal attacks, his 'Avatar,' his epigrams?"

And I answer them :—"Do you forget that there are different kinds of anger? some that can never be vicious, and others that can never be virtuous?

* Parry, 215.

The anger expressed by his pen—the sole kind that was real with him—requires to be explained, not excused or forgotten.

"Let us beware," says a great contemporary philosopher, "of him who is never irritated, and cannot understand the existence of a noble anger."*

Be so good as to examine, without pre-conceived opinions, and without prejudice, the nature of every kind of anger he displayed; see if any were personal, egotistical, or whether they did not rather spring from some noble cause; whether they were not rather the generous explosions of a soul burning with indignation at evil and injustice, because it ever held in view the contrast afforded by an ideal of its own that was only too perfect?

It is impossible, for instance, not to see that his pen was guided by one of these generous impulses when he spoke of Lord Castlereagh. He had no personal, malevolent, interested antipathy towards this gay and fashionable nobleman. His pen was inspired simply by his conscience, that revolted at sight of the evils which he attributed to Lord Castlereagh's policy. It was not the colleague, but the minister, that he wished to stigmatize together with his policy, which appeared to Lord Byron inhuman, selfish, and unjust. It was this same policy that caused Pitt to say :—

"If we were just for one hour, we should not live a day." And again :—"Perish every principle rather than England!"

What other statesman did Lord Byron attack

* Jules Simon.

except Castlereagh? But him he did detest with a noble hatred.

"By what right do you attack Lord C——?" he was asked.

"By the right," he replied, "that every honest man has to denounce the minister who ruins his country, and treads under foot every sentiment of equity and humanity."

A few days before setting out on his last journey to Greece, he said to an English lady passing through Genoa :—

"With regard to Lord Castlereagh personally, whom you hear that I have attacked, I can only say that a bad minister's memory is as much an object of investigation as his conduct while alive. He is a matter of history; and wherever I find a tyrant or a *villain*, I will mark him. I attacked him no more than I had the right to do, and than was necessary.

"Do not defend me, you will only make yourself enemies—mine are neither to be diminished nor softened."

When Lord Byron wrote about Lord Castlereagh, imagination beheld in him the author of all the evils inflicted on Ireland, the man who through a selfish feeling of nationality, dangerous even to England, had riveted the chains of all Europe.

"If he spoke and wrote thus of Lord Castlereagh," says Kennedy himself, "the reason was that he really thought him an enemy to the true interests of his country; and this sentiment, carried perhaps to excess, made him consider it just to condemn him to the execration of humanity."*

* Kennedy, 330.

What I have said with regard to his attacks on Lord Castlereagh, may equally apply to all the satire hurled against other individuals, against governments and nations. His benevolence was so great and universal, that it rendered the idea of the sufferings endured by humanity quite intolerable to him. His love of justice likewise was so great, that he became thoroughly indignant at seeing what he worshipped trampled under foot by individual or national selfishness, while deceit and injustice were reigning triumphant. Lord Byron conceived a sort of hatred and dislike for the wicked, and those who voluntarily prevented the well-being of men. And when thus indignant at some injustice, if he snatched up a pen, he could not help expressing himself with a certain kind of violence, in order to chastise, if he could not change, the guilty men who martyrized Ireland, crushed and degraded Italy, and condemned England to the hatred of the whole world. The sparkling, witty strain, mocking at all human things, which had served as a weapon for his reason while asserting the interests of truth and justice in Italy, and protesting against folly and evil, no longer sufficed him then. He required to brand with fire the limit where folly stops and crime begins. Thus it was not mocking, joking satire he would inflict on these great culprits; but burning words to mark the limits where this should stop, and stigmatize them by condemning moral deformity. This is what he did, and wished to do, with regard to Castlereagh, and also with regard to the Austrians in Italy. Shall it be said that his language was occasionally too violent? that the punishment went beyond the crime? But, in the first place, condemna-

tion was pronounced in the language of poetry; and then, does not appreciation of the measure kept depend solely on the point of view taken by reason and conscience when they sat in judgment?

Shall it be said that the moral sense of these invectives was not always brought forward with all the clearness desirable? But let them be examined attentively, and then the fine sentiments to which they owe their origin will be understood.

Let us read 'Avatar,' for instance,—'Avatar,' teeming with noble anger,—and say if any poetry exists emitting flame and light purer, and more intense in its moral life, more efficacious for keeping within the boundaries of that humane just policy from which Lord Byron never swerved.

If, in the war he waged against evil and its perpetrators, he did not outstep the limits of merited punishment, nevertheless he often did go beyond the limits of a quality (he possessed not) which is raised to the rank of a virtue, but which applied, despite conscience, to our personal interests, is but selfishness and cowardice. And therein was he truly sublime; for in attacking thus, not only the great men of the day, but likewise the prejudices, idolatries, and passions belonging to such a proud nation, he well knew the harm that would result to himself. But Lord Byron was a real hero. So soon as his conscience spoke, he heard no other voice, but kept his glance fixed on the light of justice and truth beaming at the end of his career. Without looking to the right or to the left, without taking into account the obstacles and dangers which personal prudence counselled him to avoid, he held on his course; ex-

posed his noble breast to British vengeance pursuing him across the Channel and the Alps, and then also to Genevan and Austrian shafts that flew back again across the Alps and the Channel on the wings of dark, fierce calumny.

Still I do not pretend to assert that, on some rare occasions, personal suffering did not give rise to irritation and anger. He belonged to humanity; and if, despite the harsh trials to which his sensibility was exposed, he had escaped entirely from nature's laws, he would have been not only heroic, but superhuman.

It is then very possible that, in the sad days preceding, accompanying, and following on his separation from Lady Byron, he may have been irritable. Such a host of evils overwhelmed him at once! He may have allowed to escape his lips at that time some drops of the ocean of bitterness with which his soul was overflowing. It is certain also that when the Edinburgh critics made such cruel havoc with his heart and mind, the over-excitement caused by this review had likewise for its source the wounds inflicted on his self-love. Can we be astonished at it, when we reflect that this senseless, wicked criticism succeeded to, and contrasted strangely with, the praises awarded by such judges as Mackenzie and Lord Woodhouse? They both had expressed their admiration spontaneously, and without knowing the writer: one of them was the celebrated author of the 'Man of Feeling,' and the other had brought out many esteemed works, and was considered to be at the head of Scottish literature. Besides, these cutting criticisms followed close on the strong admiration

expressed by his friends, by all the society in which he was then moving, and by a mother who idolized him! These verses, though not yet the highest expression of his genius, were certainly full of charming tenderness, grace, and naïve sensibility; moreover, they had been given to the public in such a modest way by a man so young that he might almost be called a child! If he were not conscious of his great superiority, of which he must nevertheless have felt some prophetic presentiment—restrained, doubtless, by modesty and timidity,—he must at least have been conscious that he had not, in any way, merited the brutality displayed in attacks which violated all the laws of just and allowable criticism.

Lord Byron's soul revolted at it, and in his indignation repelling assault by assault, he overstepped his aim; for he certainly went to extremes. And yet, in the very paroxysm of such irritation, was a personal sentiment his first incentive? No! it was a good, generous, affectionate feeling that actuated him: fear lest his mother should be grieved at what had occurred.

He had scarcely been told how biting the criticism was, and he had not read it, when he hastened to write to his friend Beecher:—

"Tell Mrs. Byron not to be out of humour with them, and to prepare her mind for the greatest hostility on their part. It will do no injury whatever, and I trust her mind will not be ruffled. They defeat their object by indiscriminate abuse, and they never praise, except the partisans of Lord Holland and Co. It is nothing to be abused when Southey and Moore share the same fate."

In assuming this philosophical calm, which he really did arrive at later, but which he was very far from possessing at this time,—in forcing this language on his just resentment to console his mother, when his whole being was agitated, he certainly made one of those efforts which betoken a soul as vigorous as it was beautiful. He used his pen as soon as he had satisfied this first want of his heart; but the intensity of passion destroyed his equilibrium.

When at Ravenna he wrote :—

"I recollect well the effect that criticism produced on me; it was rage, and resistance, and redress, but not despondency nor despair. A savage review is hemlock to a sucking author; the one on me knocked me down—but I got up again. This criticism was a masterpiece of low jests, a tissue of coarse invectives. It contained many commonplace expressions, low-lived insults; for instance, that one should be grateful for what one got; that a gift horse ought not to be looked at in the mouth, and other stable vocabulary; but that did not frighten me. I resolved on giving the lie to their predictions, and on showing them, that, however discordant my voice, it was not the last time they were to hear it."

But when this heat had passed away, his innate passion for that justice so cruelly violated towards himself, made him quickly recover his self-possession. He repented having written this satire, which he designated as insensate, and wished to suppress it. He even judged it more severely than others.

He wrote to Coleridge in 1815 :—

"You mention my satire, lampoon, or whatever you like to call it. I can only say, that it was written

when I was very young and very angry, and has been *a thorn in my side ever since*: more particularly as almost all the persons animadverted upon became subsequently my acquaintances, and some of them my friends, which is heaping fire on an enemy's head, and forgiving me too readily to permit me to forgive myself. The part applied to you is pert, and petulant, and shallow enough; but, although I have long done everything in my power to suppress the circulation of the whole thing, I shall always regret the wantonness or generality of its attempted attacks." *

On examining his conscience with regard to this satire, and passing judgment on himself, he adds, in a note to his own verses, after having given great praise to Jeffrey for his magnanimity, &c. :—

"*I was really too ferocious—this is mere insanity.*—B., 1816."

And farther on :—

"*This is bad; because personal.*—B., 1816."

With regard to his verses on his guardian, Lord Carlisle, so culpable towards himself, he generously remarks :—

"*Wrong also—the provocation was not sufficient to justify such acerbity.*—B., 1816."

To what he said against Wordsworth he simply adds the word, "*Unjust.*"

And again, with reference to Lord Carlisle :—

"*Much too savage, whatever the foundation may be.*—B. 1816."

And at Geneva, 14th of July, 1816, he writes :—

"*The greater part of this satire I most sincerely wish had never been written*: not only on account of the in-

* Moore, vol. iii. p. 159.

justice of much of the critical and some of the personal part of it, but the tone and temper are such as I cannot approve.—Byron, *Villa Diodati*, 1816."

Lastly, from Venice he wrote to Murray, who wished to make a superior edition of his works :—

"With regard to a future large edition, you may print all, or anything, *except* '*English Bards*,' to the republication of which at no time will I consent. I would not reprint them on any consideration. I don't think them good for much, even in point of poetry; and, as to other things, you are to recollect that I gave up the publication on account of the Hollands, and I do not think that any time or circumstances should cancel the suppression. Add to which, that, after being on terms with almost all the bards and critics of the day, it would be savage at any time, but worst of all *now*,* to revive this foolish lampoon."

"Whatever may have been the faults or indiscretion of this satire," says Moore, "there are few who would now sit in judgment upon it so severely as did the author himself, on reading it over nine years after, when he had quitted England, never to return. The copy which he then perused is now in possession of Mr. Murray, and the remarks which he has scribbled over its pages are well worth transcribing. On the first leaf we find :—

"The binding of this volume is considerably too valuable for its contents. Nothing but the consideration of its being the property of another prevents me from consigning this miserable record of mis-

* *Now* alludes to the ungenerous treatment received from many of these persons at the time of his separation.

placed anger and indiscriminate acrimony to the flames.

"BYRON."

To this ample reparation offered on account of his early satire we must add the following paragraph, from the first letter he addressed to Sir Walter Scott, in 1812:—

"I feel sorry that you should have thought it worth while to notice the '*evil works of my nonage*,' as the thing is suppressed voluntarily; and your explanation is too kind not to give me pain. The satire was written when I was very young and very angry, and fully bent on displaying my wrath and my wit, and now I am haunted by the ghosts of my wholesale assertions. I cannot sufficiently thank you for your praise."

Thus scrupulously did this conscientious man judge himself. And not only do we find him repeating the same fine sentiment a hundred times, but he caused the whole edition, then still in the hands of the publisher, to be destroyed, which of course entailed a great sacrifice of money. He became intimate with the principal personages whom he had attacked; and even, in order to testify that no resentment continued to exist in his mind against his guardian, Lord Carlisle, he seized the first opportunity that presented itself of writing in 'Childe Harold' those pathetic generous lines on the death of his son, Major Howard. He acted just in the same way every time he thought he had any fault to repair. But could this same love of justice, that guided him through life, have caused him equally to disavow what he said of Lord Castlereagh and of Ireland in 'Avatar'? of Southey and

the Austrians at Venice? or the greater part of the satirical traits contained in 'Don Juan' and the 'Age of Bronze'? I do not think so. I believe, even, that if on his death-bed, he had been asked to retract some of his writings, he would have answered as Pascal did. And this because the sentiment which under all circumstances guided his pen did not arise from any personal interest, but was only, to use the beautiful language of a great contemporary philosopher, "the indignation and revolt of the generous faculties of the soul, which, hurt by injustice, rose up proudly, to protest against human dignity, offended in one's own person or in that of others."

This sentiment not being capable of change, neither could its consequences bring any repentance. According to Lord Byron, Castlereagh was a scourge for mankind. Faithful to this opinion, as to all his great principles, he wrote to Moore in 1815 :—

"I am sick at heart of politics and slaughters; and the luck which Providence is pleased to lavish on Lord Castlereagh, is only a proof of the little value the gods set upon prosperity, when they permit such rogues as he and that drunken corporal, old Bl——, to bully their betters. From this, however, Wellington should be excepted. He *is* a man, and the Scipio of our Hannibal."

Let people read the 'Avatar,' the eleventh octave and following of the dedication of 'Don Juan,' the forty-ninth and fiftieth stanzas of the ninth canto of 'Don Juan,' as well as the epigrams; and they will have a fair idea of the generous sentiments that provoked his indignation against the inhuman policy of this minister. They will understand why he wished

to denounce him to the execration of posterity. As to his satirical verses and anger against the poet laureate, it has already been seen on whose side lay the fault, and how this jealous poet, through a combination of bad feelings, in which envy and revenge predominated, spared no means, no occasion, of doing him harm. Thus Lord Byron saw himself and his friends enveloped in one of those darksome conspiracies, forming a labyrinth of calumny, whence the purest innocence has no escape; and he felt that justice violated in his person, and in the person of his friends, by a man unworthy of respect, required him, in justice, to brand the individual. And rightly did he so with his words of fire. When Ireland, that he would fain have seen heroic under misfortune, degraded herself by her conduct towards this minister and the king, on the occasion of their visit, he, touched with noble indignation, resolved to punish and warn her; and his 'Avatar' expressed these fine sentiments. When the Prince Regent, after having shewn himself a Liberal and a Whig, denied his part, betrayed his party, and leagued with the Tories, Lord Byron's noble indignation burst forth in his verses, and, whenever occasion offered, he stigmatized such unworthy conduct.

And a proof that it was the conduct of the individual, and not personal animosity, that guided his pen, may be found in the fact that a single ray of hope of seeing this moral deformity transformed into beauty, sufficed to make him change his tone immediately. When he learned the pardon that had just been granted by George the Fourth to the guilty Lord Edward Fitzgerald, he forgot all past offences; his

soul expanded to admiration and hope; and he composed that beautiful sonnet, which so well reveals the aspirations of his great heart :—

To be the father of the fatherless,
To stretch the hand from the throne's height, and raise
His offspring, who expired in other days
To make thy sire's sway by a kingdom less,—
This is to be a monarch, and repress
Envy into unutterable praise.
Dismiss thy guard, and trust thee to such traits,
For who would lift a hand, except to bless?
Were it not easy, sir, and is 't not sweet
To make thyself beloved? and to be
Omnipotent by mercy's means? for thus
Thy sovereignty would grow but more complete:
A despot thou, and yet thy people free,
And by the heart, not hand, enslaving us.

Bologna, August 12, 1819.

And then, as if poetry did not suffice, he adds these lines in prose :—

"So the prince has annulled Lord E. Fitzgerald's condemnation. He deserves all praise, bad and good: it was truly a princely act."

All Lord Byron's expressions of indignation that have been attributed to anger, belong really to his disinterested, heroic, generous nature. We may convince ourselves of this by following him through life, beginning from childhood, at college, when he would plant himself in front of school tyrants, asking to share the punishments inflicted on his friend Peel, and always taking the part of his weak or oppressed companions; then, during his first youth, when an accumulation of unmerited griefs and injustice cast over him a shade of misanthropy, so contrary to his nature; and, lastly, up to the moment when that noble indignation burst forth which he

experienced in Greece, and which hastened his end.*

This is the truth. Nevertheless, if, in early youth, he did sometimes go beyond the limits of what may be fairly conceded to extreme sensibility,—to a certain hypochondriacal tendency of race, and more especially of his intellectual life; if he really was sometimes wearied, fatigued, discouraged, inclined to irritation, and to view things darkly, can it, therefore, be said that he weakly gave way to a morbid disposition? By no means. He always wished to sift his conscience thoroughly,—never ceased analyzing causes and symptoms, proclaiming his state morbid, and blaming himself beyond measure, far beyond what justice warranted, for a single word that had escaped his lips under the pressure of intense suffering. And even in the few moments of impatience occasioned by his last illness, he said, "Do not take the language of a sick man for his real sentiments." Lastly, he never gave over struggling against himself; seeking to acquire dominion over his faculties and passions intellectually by hard study, and materially by the strictest régime. What could he do more? it may be said. But if it be true that he had been irritable in his youth, that would only show how much he achieved; for he must have conquered himself immensely, since at Venice, Ravenna, Pisa, Genoa, and in Greece, he certainly displayed no traces of temper, and all those causes which usually excite irritation and anger in others had quite ceased to produce any in him.

"A mild philosophy," says the Countess G——,

* See 'Life in Italy.'

"every day more and more took possession of his soul. Adversity and the companionship of great thoughts strengthened him so much, that he was able to cast off the yoke of even ordinary passions, only retaining those among the number which impel to good.*

"I have seen him sometimes at Ravenna, Pisa, Genoa, when receiving news of some stupid, savage attack, from those who, in violating justice, also did him considerable harm. No emotion of anger any longer mixed itself up with his generous indignation. He appeared rather to experience a mixture of contempt, almost of quiet austere pleasure, in the struggle his great soul sustained against fools."

When Shelley saw him again at Venice, in 1818, and painted him under the name of Count Maddalo, he said:—

"In social life there is not a human being *gentler, more patient, more natural, and modest*, than Lord Byron. He is gay, open, and witty; his graver conversations steep you in a kind of inebriation. He has travelled a great deal, and possesses ineffable charm when he relates his adventures in the different countries he has visited."

Mr. Hoppner, English consul at Venice, and Lord Byron's friend, who was living constantly with him at this time, sums up his own impressions in these remarkable terms:—

"Of one thing I am certain, that I never met with goodness more real than Lord Byron's."

And some years later, when Shelley saw Lord Byron again at Ravenna, he wrote to Mrs. Shelley:—

* See his 'Life in Italy.'

"Lord Byron has made great progress in all respects; in genius, *temper*, moral views, health, and happiness. His intimacy with the Countess G—— has been of inestimable benefit to him. A fourth part of his revenue is devoted to beneficence. He has conquered his passions, and become what nature meant him to be, *a virtuous man.*"

In concluding these quotations, no longer requisite, I hope, I will only make one last observation, *that all which infallibly changes in a bad nature never did change in him.* Friendship, real love, all devoted feelings, lived on in him *unchanged* to his last hour. If he had had a bad disposition, been capricious, irritable, or given to anger, would this have been the case?

CHAPTER VIII.

LORD BYRON'S MOBILITY.

So much has been said of Lord Byron's mobility that it is necessary to analyse it well, and examine it under different aspects, so as to define and bring it within due limits. In the first place, we may ask on what grounds his biographers rested their opinion of this extraordinary mobility, which, according to them, went beyond the scope of intellectual qualities rather into the category of faults of temper? Evidently it was again through accepting a testimony the small value of which we have already shown; namely, Lord Byron's own words at twenty-three years of age—that period when passion is hardly ever a regular wind, simply swelling sails, but rather a gusty tempest, tearing them to pieces; and then again they grounded their opinion on verses in 'Don Juan,' where he explains the meaning of these expressions,—versatility and mobility. Moore, from motives we shall examine hereafter, found it expedient to take Lord Byron at his word, and to make a great fuss about this quality. In summing up his character, he reasons very cleverly on the unexampled extent, as he calls it, of this faculty, and the consequences to which it led in Lord Byron. Following in Moore's wake, other biographers have proclaimed Lord Byron versatile. Moore exaggerates so far as to pretend that this faculty made it almost impossible to find a dominant charac-

teristic in Lord Byron. As if mobility were not, in reality, a universal quality or defect,—as if men could so govern themselves throughout life as to resemble the hero of a drama, where the action is confined within classical rules.

"A man possessing the highest order of mind is, nevertheless, unequal," says La Bruyère. "He suffers from increase and diminution; he gets into a good train of thought, and falls out of it likewise.

"It is different with an automaton. Such a man is like a machine,—a spring. Weight carries him away, making him move and turn for ever in the same direction, and with equal motion. He is uniform, and never changes. Once seen, he appears the same at all times and periods of life. At best, he is but the ox lowing, or the blackbird whistling; he is fixed and stamped by nature, and I may say by species. What shows least in him is his soul; that never acts, —is never brought into play,—perpetually reposes. Such a man will be a gainer by death."

La Bruyère also says, "There is a certain mediocrity that helps to make a man appear wise."

And what says Montaigne, that great connoisseur of the human heart?—

"Our usual custom is to go right or left, over mountains or valleys, just as we are drifted by the wind of opportunity. We change like that animal which assumes the colour of the spots where it is placed. All is vacillation and inconstancy. We do not walk of ourselves; we are carried away like unto things that float now gently and now impetuously, according to the uncertain mood of the waters. Every day some new fancy arises, and

our tempers vary with the weather. This fluctuation and contradiction ever succeeding in us, has caused it to be imagined by some that we possess two souls; by others, that two faculties are perpetually at work within us, one inclining us towards good, and the other towards evil."

Montaigne also says:—"I give my soul sometimes one appearance, and sometimes another, according to the side on which I look at it; if I speak variously of myself, it is because I look at myself variously: all contrarieties, in one degree or other, are found in me, according to the number of turns given. Thus, I am shamefaced, insolent, chaste, sensual, talkative, taciturn, laborious, delicate, ingenious, stupid, sad, good-natured, deceitful, true, learned, ignorant, liberal, avaricious, and prodigal, just according to the way in which I look at myself; and whoever studies himself attentively, will find this *variety and discordancy* even in his judgment.

"We are all *parts of a whole*, and formed of such shapeless, mixed materials, that every part and every moment does its own work."

If, then, we all experience the varied influences of our passions a hundred times in a lifetime, not to say in every twenty-four hours; if we are sensible of a thousand physical and moral causes, perpetually modifying our dispositions, and our words, making us differ to-day from what we were yesterday; if even the coldest and most stoical temperaments do not wholly escape from these influences, how could Moore be surprised that Lord Byron, who was so sensitive and full of passion, so hardly used by men and Providence, that he should not prove invulner-

able? Moore was not surprised at it in reality, it is true; he only made-believe to be so, and that because Lord Byron was wanting in some of those virtues called peculiarly English. Lord Byron had no superstitious patriotism; he did not love his country through sentiment or passion, but on duty and principle. He loved her, but justice also! and he loved justice best. And in order to do homage to truth, he had committed the fault of saying a host of irreverential truths concerning that country, and also many individuals belonging to it; consequently he had made many enemies for himself. Indeed, his enemies might be found in every camp: among the orthodox, in the literary world, and the world of fashion, among the fair sex, and in the political world. Moore, for his part, wished to live in peace with all these potentates,—the warm, comfortable, and brilliant atmosphere of their society had become a necessity for him; and wishing also, perhaps, to obtain pardon for his friend's boldness, he probably thought to conciliate all things by sparing the susceptibility of the great. Instead, then, of attributing Lord Byron's severe appreciations to observation, experience, and serious reflection, he preferred declaring them the result of capricious and inconsistent mobility. But more just in the depths of his soul than he was in words, Moore, it is easy to see, felt painfully conscious of the wrong done to his illustrious friend, and ardently wished to make his own weakness tally with truth. What was the result? The brilliant edifice he had raised was so unstable of basis, that it could not stand the logic of facts and conclusions. While appearing to consider the excess of this

quality as a defect, and calling it dangerous, he was all the time showing that Lord Byron had strength to overcome any real danger it contained; he was giving it to be understood that this versatility of intellect might exist without the least mobility of principle; he made out that mobility was the ornament of his intelligence, just as he had shown constancy to be the ornament of his soul. Then, after having reasoned cleverly on this quality, yclept versatility when applied to the intelligence, and mobility when applied to conduct; after having shown how predominant it must have been in Lord Byron through his great impressionability; Moore says that Lord Byron did yield to his versatile humour, without scruple or resistance, in all things attracting his mind, in all the excursions of reason or fancy assuming all the forms in which his genius could manifest its power, transporting himself into all the regions of thought where there were any new conquests to make; and that thereby he gave to the world a grand spectacle, displayed a variety of unlimited and almost contradictory powers, and finally achieved a succession of unexampled triumphs in every intellectual field. Then, in order to characterise completely this quality of Lord Byron, Moore further adds:—

"It must be felt, indeed, by all readers of that work, and particularly by those who, being gifted with but a small portion of such ductility themselves, are unable to keep pace with his changes, that the suddenness with which he passes from one strain of sentiment to another, from the gay to the sad, from the cynical to the tender,—begets a distrust in the

sincerity of one or both moods of mind which interferes with, if not chills, the sympathy that a more natural transition would inspire. In general, such a suspicion would do him injustice; as among the singular combinations which his mind presented, that of uniting at once versatility and depth of feeling was not the least remarkable."

But, throughout this analysis by Moore, do we see aught save an intellectual quality? Does it not stand out in relief, a pure, high attribute of genius? For this to be a defect, it would be necessary that, leaving the domain of intelligence, it should become mobility, by entering into the course of his daily life in *extraordinary* proportions. And how does it, in reality, enter there? Were his principles in politics, in religion, in all that constitutes the man of honour in the highest acceptation of the term, at all affected by it? Did his true affections, or even his simple tastes, suffer from the varied impresses of his versatile genius? In short, was Lord Byron inconstant? Moore has sufficiently answered, since all he remarked and said oblige us to rank *constancy* among Lord Byron's most shining virtues.* And as a human heart cannot at the same time be governed by a virtue and its opposite vice, what must we say to those who should persist (for there are some, doubtless, who will) despite all axioms, in considering Lord Byron as a changeable, capricious, fickle man? I reply, that Lord Byron proved, once more, the truth of the observation made by that moralist, who said: "The most beautiful souls are those possessing the greatest variety and pliancy," and

* See the chapter on 'Constancy.'

that he realized in himself, after a splendid fashion, the moral phenomenon remarked in *Cato the Elder*, who, according to Livy, possessed a mind at once so versatile and so comprehensive, that whatever he did it might be thought he was born solely for that.

I will acknowledge, then, the intellectual versatility and the mobility of Lord Byron, but on condition of their being reduced to their real proportions; of their being shown as they ever existed in him, that is to say, under subjection to duty, honour, and feeling. Through his extreme impressionability, and his power of combining, in the liveliest manner, the greatest contrasts, through the pleasure he took in exercising such extraordinary faculties, and in manifesting them to others, Lord Byron sometimes assumed such an appearance of sceptical indifference and caprice, that he might almost be said to show a certain intermission of faculties, and even of ideas. But if his words and writings are examined, it will be seen that this mobility was only skin-deep. It might affect his nerves and muscles, but did not penetrate into his system. It animated his writings occasionally, and oftener his words, *but never his actions!* for, if in some rare moments of life, he abandoned his will to the sway of light breezes, that was only for very evanescent fancies of youth, in which neither heart nor honour were at stake. And even then it was rather by word than by deed, as occurred at Newstead, when he was twenty years of age, and at Venice when he was twenty-eight. His energetic soul did not, like feebler natures, require inconstancy to awaken it. As to ideas, they were only change-

able in him, when they were by nature open to discussion or *accessory*; and they remained floating, until having been elaborated by his great reason, he could admit them into the small number of such as he considered chosen and indisputable. Then they found a sort of sanctuary in his mind, remaining there sacred and unmoved, just like his true sentiments of heart.

His mobility, thus limited and circumscribed within due bounds by unswerving principles and the dictates of an excellent heart, *was thus shorn of all danger*, and had for its first result to contribute towards producing that amiability and that wonderful fascination which he exercised over all those who came near him. Moore quotes, on this head, the words of Cooper, who, speaking of persons with a changeful intellectual temperament, says, that their society "*ought to be preferred in this world, for, all scenes in life having two sides, one dark and the other brilliant, the mind possessing an equal admixture of melancholy and vivacity, is the one best organised for contemplating both.*" Moore adds:—"It would not be difficult to show that to this readiness in reflecting all hues, whether of the shadows or the lights of our variegated existence, Lord Byron owed not only the great range of his influence as a poet, but those powers of *fascination* which he possessed as a man. This susceptibility, indeed, of immediate impressions, which in him were so active, lent a charm, of all others the most attractive, to his social intercourse, and brought whatever was most agreeable in his nature into play."

All those who knew him have said the same thing. This charm was the immediate consequence of his

qualities; but they produced another result, that justice requires to be mentioned. Mobility being united in him with constancy and the most heroic firmness, added lustre to his soul through that great difficulty overcome which amounts to virtue. Moralists of all ages have generally found the virtue of constancy so rare, that they have said,—

"Wait for death to judge a man."

"In all antiquity," says Montaigne, "it would be difficult to find a dozen men who shaped their lives in a certain steady course, which is the chief end of wisdom."

This is true as regards the generality of minds; but to overcome this difficulty, when one has a mind eager for emotion, variable, with width and depth capable of discerning simultaneously the for and against of everything, and thus being necessarily exposed to perplexity of choice, it is surely marvellous if a mind so constituted be also constant. Now, Lord Byron personified this marvel. In him was seen the realisation of that rare thing in nature, intellectual versatility combined with unswerving principle; mobility of mind united to a constant heart. In short, to sum up:—He possessed the amount of versatility requisite to manifest his genuis under all its aspects; a degree of mobility most charming in social intercourse; and such constancy as is always estimable, always a virtue, and which, united to a temperament like his,* becomes positively wonderful.

* See the chapter on 'Constancy.'

CHAPTER IX.

LORD BYRON'S MISANTHROPY AND SOCIABILITY.

LORD BYRON has also been accused of misanthropy. But what is a misanthrope? Since Lucian, this name has been bestowed on the man who owns no friend but himself; who looks upon all others as so many rogues, for whom relatives, friends, country, are but empty names; who despises fame, and aims at no distinction except that conferred by his strange manners, savage anger, and inhumanity.

When those who have known Lord Byron, and studied his life, compare him to this type, it may well be asked whether such persons be in their right understanding. The famous tower of Babel, and all the confusion ensuing, rise up to view.

The excess of absurdity may give way, however, to some little moderation in judgment. It will be said, for instance, that there are different kinds of misanthropy. Lucian's 'Timon' does not at all resemble Molière's 'Alceste': Lord Byron's misanthropy was not like either of theirs; his was only of the kind that mars sociability, good temper, and other amiable qualities. In short, we shall be given to understand that Lord Byron is only accused of *having liked solitude too much, of having shunned his fellow creatures too much, and thought too ill of humanity.*

But these modifications cannot satisfy our con-

science. Still too many reasons of astonishment may be offered to allow us to resist the desire of adding other facts and indisputable proofs to those already adduced in the chapter where we examined the nature and limits of his melancholy at all periods of life, and throughout all its phases.* This chapter might even suffice as a response to the above strange accusation.

A better answer still would be found in all the proofs we have given of his goodness, generosity, and humanity. Nevertheless, we think it right rather to appeal to the patience of our readers; so that they may consider with us, more especially, one of the peculiar aspects of Lord Byron's character; namely, his sociability.

That Lord Byron loved solitude, and that it was a want of his nature who can doubt? As a child, we know, his delight was to wander alone on the sea shore, on the Scottish strand. At school, he was wont to withdraw from his beloved companions, and the games he liked so well, in order to pass whole hours seated on the solitary stone in the churchyard at Harrow, which has been fitly called *Byron's Tomb*. He himself describes these inclinations of his childhood in the 'Lament of Tasso':—

> "Of objects all inanimate I made
> Idols, and out of wild and lonely flowers,
> And rocks, whereby they grew, a paradise,
> Where I did lay me down within the shade
> Of waving trees, and dream'd uncounted hours,
> Though I was chid for wandering; and the wise
> Shook their white aged heads o'er me, and said,
> Of such materials wretched men were made."

Arrived at adolescence, he showed so little inclina-

* See chapter on 'Melancholy and Gaiety.'

tion to mix in society that his friends reproached him with his overweening love for solitude. Amidst the gay dissipation of university life, he was often a prey to vague disquietude. Like the majority of great spirits that had preceded him at Cambridge,—Milton, Gray, Locke, &c.,—he did not enjoy his stay there. He even made a satire upon it in his early poems. At a later period, when he had acquired fame, at the very height of his triumphs, when he was *the observed of all observers*, he often caught himself dreaming on the happiness of escaping from fashionable society, and getting home; for, like Pope, he greatly preferred quiet reading to the most agreeable conversation.

All his life there were hours and days wherein his mind absolutely required this repose.

It may, then, truly be said that he loved solitude, and felt a real attraction for it. But would it be equally just to attribute this taste to melancholy, and then to call his melancholy *misanthropy?* Those who have deeply studied the nature of a certain order of genius, and the phases of its development, will discover something very different in the impulse that attracted the child Byron to the sea-shore in Scotland, and to the sepulchral stone shaded over by the tall trees of Harrow? They will see therein, not the melancholy apparent to vulgar eyes, but the forecast of genius, to be revealed sooner or later, and with a further promise, in the antipathy shown for the routine of schools, and especially of the University of Cambridge,—a suffocating atmosphere for genius, equally uncongenial to Milton, Dryden, Gray, and Locke, who all, like Lord Byron, and more bitterly than he, exercised their satiric vein on it. As for

the slight attraction he sometimes showed for the world in his youth—in his seventeenth year—and which the excellent Mr. Beecher reproached him with, his feelings are too well defined by the noble boy himself for us to dare to substitute any words of ours in lieu of those used by him, in justification to his friend.

Dear Beecher, you tell me to mix with mankind;
I cannot deny such a precept is wise;
But retirement accords with the tone of my mind:
I will not descend to a world I despise.

Did the senate or camp my exertions require,
Ambition might prompt me at once to go forth;
And, when infancy's years of probation expire,
Perchance, I may strive to distinguish my birth.

The fire in the cavern of Etna concealed
Still mantles unseen in its secret recess:
At length in a volume terrific revealed,
No torrent can quench it, no bounds can repress.

Oh! thus the desire in my bosom for fame
Bids me live but to hope for posterity's praise.
Could I soar with the phœnix on pinions of flame,
With him I would wish to expire in the blaze.

For the life of a Fox, of a Chatham the death,
What censure, what danger, what woe would I brave!
Their lives did not end when they yielded their breath;
Their glory illumines the gloom of their grave.

Yet why should I mingle in Fashion's full herd?
Why crouch to her leaders, or cringe to her rules?
Why bend to the proud, or applaud the absurd?
Why search for delight in the friendship of fools?

I have tasted the sweets and the bitters of love;
In friendship I early was taught to believe;
My passion the matrons of prudence reprove;
I have found that a friend may profess, yet deceive.

To me what is wealth?—it may pass in an hour,
If tyrants prevail, or if Fortune should frown:
To me what is title? the phantom of power;
To me what is fashion?—I seek but renown.

Deceit is a stranger as yet to my soul:
I still am unpractised to varnish the truth:
Then why should I live in a hateful control?
Why waste upon folly the days of my youth?
1806.

Thus it was the desire of fame that then engrossed his whole soul; the wish of adding some great action to illustrate a name already ennobled by his ancestors.

Subsequently, this ardent desire may have become weakened. Alas! he had been made to pay so dearly for satisfying it. But at the outset of his career this aspiration after glory, that belongs to the noblest souls, was the strongest impulse he had,—the one that often made him prefer the solitary exercise of intelligence to even the usual dissipation of youth, and when he did yield, like others, he punished himself by self-inflicted blame and contempt, often expressed in an imprudent, exaggerated manner.

Nevertheless, the paths that lead to glory are various, and trod by many; which should he choose? Then did he feel the further torment of uncertainty. His faculties were various, and he was to learn this to his cost. He was to feel, though vaguely, that he might just as well aspire to the civic as to the military crown; be an orator in the senate, or a hero on the field of battle.

Among all the careers presenting themselves before him, the one that flattered him least was to be an author or a literary man. But he was living in the midst of young men well versed in letters. Most of them amused themselves with making verses. To tranquillize his heart, and exercise his activity of mind, he also made some, but without attaching

any great importance to them. These verses were charming; the first flower and perfume of a young, pure soul, devoted to friendship and other generous emotions. Nevertheless, a criticism that was at once malignant, unjust, and cruel, fell foul of these delightful, clever inspirations. The injustice committed was great. The modest, gentle, but no less sensitive mind of the youth was both indignant and overwhelmed at it. Other sorrows, other illusions dispelled, further increased his agitation, making a wound that might really have become misanthropy, had his heart been less excellent by nature. But it could not rankle thus in him, and his sufferings only resulted in making him quit England with less regret, and throw into his verses and letters misanthropical expressions, no sooner written than disavowed by the general tone of cordiality and good humour that reigned throughout them; and, lastly, by suggesting the imprudent idea of choosing a misanthrope as the hero of the poem in which he was to sing his own pilgrimage.

This necessity of essaying and giving expression to his genius also made him desire solitude yet more. He found poetic loneliness beneath the bright skies of the East, where he pitched his tent, slowly to seek the road to that fame for which his soul thirsted. But when he arrived at it,—when he became transformed, so to say, into an idol,—did this necessity for solitude abandon him? By no means.

"*April* 10*th*.—I do not know that I am happiest when alone," he writes in his memoranda; "but this I am sure of, I never am long in the society even of her I love—and God knows how I love her—

without a yearning for the company of my lamp and my library. Even in the day, I send away my carriage oftener than I use or abuse it."

This desire, this craving for his lamp and his library,—this absence of taste for certain realities of life,—show affinities between Lord Byron and another great spirit, Montaigne. One might fancy one hears Lord Byron saying, with the other :—

"The continual intercourse I hold with ancient thought, and the ideas caught from those wondrous spirits of bygone times, disgust me with others and with myself."

He also felt *ennui* at living in an age that *only produced very ordinary things.*

But whether he felt happy or sad, it was always in silence, in retirement, and contemplation of the great visible nature, carrying his thought away to what does not the less exist though veiled from our feeble sight and intellect; it was there, I say, that his mind and heart sought strength, peace, and consolation.

His soul was bursting with mighty griefs when he arrived in Switzerland, on the borders of Lake Leman. He loved this beautiful spot, but did not deem himself sufficiently alone to enjoy it fully.

> "There is too much of man here, to look through
> With a fit mind the might which I behold,"

said he; and he promised himself soon to arrive at that beloved solitude, so necessary to him for enjoying well the grand spectacle presented by Helvetian nature; but, he added :—

> "To fly from, need not be to hate, mankind:
>
> ———
>
> Nor is it discontent to keep the mind
> Deep in its fountain, lest it over boil
> In the hot throng."

And then he continues :—

> "I live not in myself, but I become
> Portion of that around me; and to me
> High mountains are a feeling."

Thus, even in the midst of the beloved solitude so necessary to him, there was no misanthropy in his thoughts or feelings, but simply the desire of not being disturbed in his studies and reveries. Lord Byron often said, that solitude made him better. He thought, on that head, like La Bruyère :—"*All the evil in us*," says that great moralist, "*springs from the impossibility of our being alone. Thence we fall into gambling, luxury, dissipation, wine, women, ignorance, slandering, envy, forgetfulness of self, and of God.*" If the satisfaction of this noble want were to be called *misanthropy*, few of our great spirits, whether philosophers, poets, or orators, could escape the accusation. For, with almost all of them, the taste for retirement and solitude has been likewise a necessity : a condition without which we should have lost their greatest *chefs-d'œuvre*. The biography of the noblest minds leaves no doubt on this head. But if Lord Byron did not use solitude like a misanthrope, if he loved it solely as a means, and not as an end, so that we may even say it was with him an antidote to misanthropy, can we equally give proof of his sociability? To clear up this point, we have only to glance at his whole life. For the sake of avoiding repetition, let us pass over his childhood, so full of tenderness and ardour for youthful pastimes; his boyhood, all devoted to feelings affectionate and passionate; his University life, where sociability seemed to predominate over

regular study; the vacations, when it was such pleasure to act plays, and he was the life of amateur theatres,—a time that has left behind it such an enthusiastic memory of him, that when Moore, some years after Lord Byron's death, went to obtain information about it from the amiable Pigott family, not one member could be found to admit that Lord Byron *had the smallest defect.* Let us also pass over his sojourn at Newstead, when his sociability and gaiety appear even to have been too noisy; and let us arrive at that period of his life when he began to be called a misanthrope, because he gave himself that appellation, because real sorrows had cast a shade over his life, and because, wishing to devote himself to graver things, his object was to withdraw from the society of gay, noisy companions, and then to mature his mind in distant travel. He left his native land, but in company with his friend Hobhouse, a man distinguished for his intelligence, and who, instead of testifying to his fellow traveller's misanthropy, bears witness, on the contrary, to his amiable, sociable disposition.

When this friend was obliged to take leave of him in Greece, and return to England, Lord Byron frequented the society of pleasant persons like Lord Sligo, Mr. Bruce, and Lady Hester Stanhope, whom he met at Athens, alleviating his studious solitude by intercourse with them.

When he also returned to England, after two years of absence, great misfortunes overwhelmed him. He lost successively his mother, dear friends, and other loved ones. Not to sink beneath these

accumulated blows, and mistrusting his own strength, he called in to aid him the society of his friends.

"My dear Scrope," wrote he, "if you have an instant, come and join me, I entreat you. I want a friend; I am in utter desolation. Come and see me; let me enjoy as long as I can the company of those friends that yet remain."

Some time after, having attained the highest popularity, and his mind being soothed by friendship even more than by fame, he entered into the fashionable society in which his rank entitled him to move. He frequented the world very much at this period, cultivated it assiduously. A moment even came when he seemed to be completely absorbed by gaiety. Sometimes going to as many as fourteen assemblies, balls, &c., in one evening. "He acknowledged to me," says Dallas, "that it amused him." Did not his genius suffer then from the new infatuation? So courted, flattered, and surrounded by temptations, did not this worldly life prove too seductive, hurtful to his mind, heart, and independence of character? Did he draw from the world's votaries his rules of judgment, his ways of thought? Did he yield when brought in contact with that terrible *English law of opinion?* No; Lord Byron was safe from all such dangers. Amid the vortex in which he allowed himself to be whirled along, his mind was never idle. In the drawing-rooms he frequented, his intellectual curiosity found field for exercise. Though so young, he had already reflected much on human nature in general; but he still required to study individuals. It was in society that his extraordinary penetration could find out true character, discover the reality

lurking under a borrowed mask. The great world formed an excellent school to discipline his mind. There he found subjects for observation that he afterwards put in order, and brought to maturity in retirement.

"Wherever he went," says Moore, "Lord Byron found field for observation and study. To a mind with glance so deep, lively, and varied, every place, and every occupation, presented some view of interest; and, whether he were at a ball, in the boxing school, or the senate, a genius like his turned everything to advantage."

And if *salons* in general were powerless to exercise any bad influence over him, this impossibility was still greater with regard to London *salons*. Without adopting as exact the picture drawn of them by a learned Academician,* in a book more witty than true, wherein we read:—"that under pain of passing for eccentric, of giving scandal or exciting alarm, English people are forbidden to speak of others or themselves, of politics, religion, or intellectual things or matters of taste; but only of the environs, the round-abouts, a pic-nic, a visit to some ruin, a fashionable preacher, a fox-hunt, and the rain,—that never-ending theme kindly furnished by the inconstant climate;" without, I say, adopting this picture as true, for in England it must be considered a clever caricature, it is nevertheless certain, that the discipline of fashionable London *salons* requires independence of mind to be in a measure sacrificed. The tone reigning in these *salons*, which are only opened during the season, is quite different from that produced by the open-hearted

* M. Nisard.

hospitality which renders English country residences so very agreeable. Could Lord Byron long take pleasure in the salons of the metropolis, where everything is on the surface and noisy, where one may say that people are content with simply showing themselves, intending concealment all the while; or where they show themselves *what they are not;* where set forms, or a vocabulary of their own, so far limits allowable subjects of conversation, that fools may easily have the advantage over clever men (for intellect is looked upon as suspicious, dangerous, bold, and called an eccentricity). Lord Byron, so frank and open-hearted, loving fame, and having a sort of presentiment that Heaven would not accord him sufficient time to reap his full harvest of genius, consequently regretting the moments he was forced to lose; must he not, after seeking amusement in these assemblies, soon have found that they lasted too long, and were too fatiguing? Must he not often have well nigh revolted against himself, felt something cold and heavy restraining his outburst of soul, something like a sort of slavery; must he not have understood that it was requisite for him to escape from such useless pastimes in order to re-invigorate himself by study, in the society of his own thoughts, and those of the master spirits of ages? Yes, Lord Byron did experience all that. *Ennui* of the world called him back to solitude. We cannot doubt it, he said so himself:—

"Last night, *party* at Lansdowne House; to-night, party at Lady Charlotte Greville's—*deplorable waste of time*, and loss of *temper*, *nothing imparted*, *nothing acquired—talking without ideas*—if anything like

thought were in my mind, it was not on the subjects on which we were gabbling. Heigho! and in this way half London pass what is called life. To-morrow, there is Lady Heathcote's—shall I go? Yes; to punish myself for not having a pursuit."

And, elsewhere :—

"Shall I go to Lansdowne's? to the Berry's? They are all pleasant; but I don't know, I don't think that *soirées* improve one."

He will not go into the world :—

"I don't believe this worldly life does any good; how could such a world ever be made? Of what use are dandies, for instance, and kings, and fellows at college, and women of a certain age, and many men of my age, myself foremost?"

Having changed his apartments, he had not yet got all his books; was reading without order, composing nothing; and he suffered in consequence. "I must set myself to do something directly; my heart already begins to feed on itself." He accuses himself of not profiting enough by time. "Twenty-six years of age! I might and ought to be a Pasha at that age. '*I 'gin to be weary of the sun.*'" But let him be with a clever friend, like Moore, for instance, and, oh! then the *ennui* of salons becomes metamorphosed into pleasure for him, without taking away his clear-sightedness as to the world's worth.

"Are you going this evening," writes he to Moore, "to Lady Cahir's? I will, if you do; and wherever we can unite in follies, let us embark on the *same ship of fools*. I went to bed at five, and got up at nine."

And elsewhere, after having expressed his dis-

appointment at seeing Moore so little during the season, he calls London "a populous desert, where one should be able to keep one's thirst like the camel. *The streams are so few, and for the most part so muddy.*"

And ten years later, in the fourteenth canto of 'Don Juan,' he said, speaking of fashionable London society :—

"Although it seems both prominent and pleasant,
There is a sameness in its gems and ermine,
A dull and family likeness through all ages,
Of no great promise for poetic pages.

XVI.

"With much to excite, there 's little to exalt;
Nothing that speaks to all men and all times;
A sort of varnish over every fault;
A kind of common-place, even in their crimes;
Factitious passions, wit without much salt,
A want of that true nature which sublimes
Whate'er it shows with truth; a smooth monotony
Of character, in those at least who have got any.

XVII.

"Sometimes, indeed, like soldiers off parade,
They break their ranks and gladly leave the drill;
But then the roll-call draws them back afraid,
And they must be or seem what they were: still
Doubtless it is a brilliant masquerade;
But when of the first sight you have had your fill,
It palls—at least it did so upon me,
This paradise of *pleasure and ennui*."

It was thus that he judged what is called the great world, the fashionable crowd. Yet never having ceased to frequent it, he also might have said, with Plutarch :—"My taste leads me to fly the world; but the gentleness of my nature brings me back to it again."

The best proof, however, of his sociable disposition does not lie in this fact of his going much to great

assemblies, since he submitted to, rather than sought after that; it consists in the pleasure he always took in the society of friends, and those whom he loved; in the want of *intimacy* which he ever experienced. In such quiet little circles he was truly himself, quite different to what he appeared in salons. Then only could he be really known. His wit, gaiety, and simplicity were unveiled solely for friends and intimates. He, so light-hearted, became serious amid the forced laughter of drawing-rooms; he, so witty, waxed silent and gloomy amid unmeaning conventional talkativeness. Those who only saw him in salons, or on fashionable staircases, during the four years he passed in England, did not really know him; is it surprising that he should have been wrongly judged? Moore alone has tolerably well described the agreeable, sociable, gay, kind being Lord Byron was.

When he quitted England, his sociable disposition did not abandon him, though his soul was filled with bitterness. He had scarcely arrived at Geneva, when he became intimate with Shelley. He made him the companion of his walks, passed whole days and evenings in his society, and that of his amiable wife. Several London friends came to join him in Switzerland. In his excursions over the Alps, Lord Broughton (then Mr. Hobhouse) was always his faithful companion. He frequented and appreciated then, more than he had ever done before in England, the society of Madame de Staël at Coppet, because it was there and not in drawing-rooms that this noble-hearted woman showed herself what she was. Always attracted by high intellect, he became intimate with

Count Rossi, entertaining so great a sympathy for him, that often when the Count was about to leave him and return to Geneva, Lord Byron retained him by his entreaties. As to the natives of Geneva, as he detested Calvinism, and knew that they believed the calumnies wickedly spread abroad against him by some of his country-people, he did not see them often, for he did not like them. "What are you going to do in that den of honest men," said he one day to Count Rossi, who was preparing to leave. On arriving at Milan, he immediately adopted the style of life usual there. Every evening he went to the theatre, occupying M. de Breme's box, together with a group of young and clever men; amongst them I may name Silvio Pellico, Abbé de Breme, Monti, Porro, and Stendhal (Beyle), who have all unanimously testified to his amiability, social temper, and fascinating conversation. At Venice, he allowed himself to be presented in the most hospitable mansions of the nobility; particularly distinguishing those where Countess Albruzzi and Countess Benzoni presided, for he always went to one or other of these ladies after leaving the theatre. Nor did he disdain, during the early part of his stay at Venice, even the official salon of the Comtesse de Goetz. But his aversion for Austrian oppression and the perfidy of the official press soon obliged him to withdraw; for the oppressors of Venice, knowing him to be a formidable enemy, sought to discredit him by spreading all sorts of calumnious reports against him and his private character.*

It has been seen in his 'Life in Italy' how he

* See his 'Life in Italy.'

divided his time at Venice, and the impression he made wherever there had not been a preconceived purpose of judging him unfavourably. In the morning, his first walk was always directed towards the convent of the Armenian Fathers, in the island of San Lazzaro. He went there to study their language; and these good monks conceived an extreme affection for him. Afterwards he would cross the Laguna going to the Lido, where his stables were. He was accustomed to ride on horseback with the different friends who chanced to arrive from England: such as Hobhouse, Monk Lewis, Rose, Kinnaird, Shelley, and more particularly still with Mr. Hoppner, Consul-General for England at Venice, a man of the noblest stamp, much beloved by Lord Byron, and who, in the account he has left of this intercourse, cannot find words adequate for expressing all he wished to say of the charming social qualities Lord Byron displayed at Venice. "*People have no idea*," says he, "*of Lord Byron's gaiety, vivacity, and* amiability." He followed Italian customs, went every evening to the theatre, where his box was always filled with friends and acquaintances; and after that, generally spent the remainder of the evening or night, according to the then custom of Venice, in the most distinguished circles of the town, principally at the houses of Countess Albruzzi and Countess Benzoni, where he was not only welcome, but so much liked, that these salons were voted dull when he did not appear. Lastly, his social qualities and amiability gave so much pleasure at Venice, and the inhabitants were so desirous of keeping him amongst them, that his departure for Ravenna actually stirred up malice,

quite foreign to the usual simplicity characterising Venetian society.*

The friends who came to see him there,—Hobhouse, Lewis, Kinnaird, Shelley, Rose, &c.,—succeeded each other at short intervals, and their arrivals were so many fêtes for him. But while he was leading this sociable life, vulgar tourists, who had not been able to succeed in getting presented to him, took their revenge, by repeating in every direction fables they had gleaned from the gondoliers for a few pence—viz., that Lord Byron was a misanthrope and hated his countrymen. Mr. Hoppner, who was an ocular witness of the life which Lord Byron led at Venice, and whose testimony is so worthy of respect, told Moore how much annoyance Lord Byron endured from English travellers, bent on following him everywhere, eyeglass in hand, staring at him with impertinence or affectation during his walks, getting into his palace under some pretext, and even penetrating into his bedroom.

"Thence," said he, "his bitterness towards them. The sentiments he has expressed in a note termed cynical, as well as the misanthropical expressions to be found in his first poems, *are not at all his natural sentiments*."

And then he adds that he is very certain "*never to have met with in his lifetime more real goodness than in Lord Byron.*"

Moore, also, is indignant at all these perfidious inventions :—

"Among those minor misrepresentations," says he, "of which it was Lord Byron's fate to be the victim,

* See his 'Life in Italy.'

advantage was at this time taken of his professed distaste to the English, to accuse him of acts of inhospitality, and even rudeness, towards some of his fellow-countrymen. How far different was his treatment of all who ever visited him, many grateful testimonies might be collected to prove; but I shall here content myself with selecting a few extracts from an account given to me by Mr. Joy, of a visit which, in company with another English gentleman, he paid to the noble poet, during the summer of 1817, at his villa on the banks of the Brenta. After mentioning the various civilities they had experienced from Lord Byron; and, among others, his having requested them to name their own day for dining with him:—'We availed ourselves,' says Mr. Joy, 'of this considerate *courtesy* by naming the day fixed for our return to Padua, when our route would lead us to his door; and we were welcomed with all the cordiality which was to be expected from so friendly an invitation. Such traits of kindness in such a man deserve to be recorded on account of the numerous slanders heaped upon him by some of the tribes of tourists, who resented, as a personal affront, his resolution to avoid their impertinent inroads upon his retirement.

"'So far from any appearance of indiscriminate aversion to his countrymen, his inquiries about his friends in England were most anxious and particular.

"'After regaling us with an excellent dinner (in which, by-the-bye, a very English joint of roast beef showed that he did not extend his antipathies to all John Bullisms), he took us in his carriage some miles on our route towards Padua, after apologizing to my

fellow-traveller for the separation, on the score of *his anxiety to hear all he could of his friends in England:* and I quitted him with a confirmed impression of the strong ardour and sincerity of his attachment to those by whom he did not fancy himself slighted or ill-treated!' "

It has been seen elsewhere* that Mr. Rose, speaking of Lord Byron's sociable temper at Venice, said *his presence sufficed to diffuse joy and gaiety in the salons he frequented.*"

When any worthy persons among his countrymen arrived, his *house*, his *time*, his *purse* were at *their service.*

For further proof, let people only read the details Captain Basil Hall gave Murray of his intercourse with Byron.

" *His witty, clever conversation,*" says Shelley, who visited him at Venice in 1817, *enlivened our winter nights and taught me to know my own soul. Day dawned upon us, ere we perceived with surprise that we were still listening to him.*"

When he went from Venice to Romagna, he passed by Ferrara. But, though eager to arrive where his heart summoned him, he did not fail delivering the letters of introduction given him by friends. At Ferrara he made the acquaintance of a noble family, and went into society there, speaking of it afterwards in the most flattering manner.†

At Ravenna, he frequented all the salons where he was introduced; and at the request of Count G——, became the *cavaliere servente* of the young Countess. According to the custom of the country, he accom-

* See chapter on 'Gaiety and Melancholy.' † See his 'Life in Italy.'

panied her to assemblies or theatres, or spent his evenings in her family circle. At Pisa, he held aloof from the world, because his friends, the Gambas, who had taken refuge there in consequence of the troubles and political enmities existing in Romagna, did not wish to mix in society. But he passed all his evenings regularly with them, either at their house, or sometimes dispensing hospitality at home with the greatest affability and kindness.

"I believe I cannot give a better proof of the sociability of Lord Byron's disposition," says Medwin, "than by speaking of the gaiety that prevailed at his Wednesday dinner-parties, at Pisa. His table, when alone, was more than frugal; but on these occasions, every sort of wine, and all the delicacies of the season, were served up in grand display, worthy of the best houses. I never knew any one who did the honours of his house with greater affability and hospitality than Lord Byron.

"The vivacity of his wit, the warmth of his eloquence, are things not to be expressed. Could we forget the tone of his voice, or his gesture, adding charm to all he said?" *

At Pisa he generally received in the morning all those who wished to see him, and amongst others several of his countrymen, mostly acquaintances or friends of Shelley, who also went to see him every day. In the afternoon he rode out on horseback, still followed by his countrymen, and by the young Count Gamba; amusing himself with them till evening came, in shooting exercises or in long excursions. We have already said how he employed his evenings.

* Medwin, vol. ii., p. 138.

In fact, he was so seldom alone that people could not understand how he found time for writing. He did find it, however, and without subtracting from social intercourse. Nor was it solely because he composed so rapidly, but likewise because he gave to occupation the hours that young men are wont to pass in idle, not to say vicious, amusements. When he went from Pisa to a villa situated on the hills that overlook Leghorn and the Mediterranean, in order to pass the great heats of summer there, an American painter, Mr. West, who had been commissioned by an American society, requested him to sit for his picture. Lord Byron could not give him much time, and the portrait was not successful. But Mr. West, who, if not a good artist, possessed a just and cultivated mind, drew a picture of his moral character as true as it was flattering,—his pen doing him better service than his brush :—

"I returned to Leghorn," says he, "hardly able to persuade myself that this was the proud misanthrope whose character had ever appeared shrouded in gloom and mystery. For I never remember having met with *gentler*, *more attractive manners* in my life. When I told him the idea I had previously formed, what I had thought about him, he was extremely amused, laughed a great deal and said, 'Don't you find that I am like everybody else?'"

But Mr. Rogers thought him better than everybody else, for he says :—

"From all I had observed, I left him under the impression that he possessed an excellent heart, which had been *completely misunderstood*, perhaps on account of his mobility and apparent lightness of

manner. Indeed he took a capricious pleasure in bringing out this contrast between himself and others."

On quitting Pisa he went to Genoa, and there produced the same impression on all who saw him until he left for Greece.

At this last stage of his life, the testimonies as to his amiable, genial nature are so unanimous, from the time of his arrival to the day of his death, that we cannot refrain from quoting the language used by some of those who saw him then.

"When I was presented to him," writes Mr. D—— to Colonel Stanhope, "I was particularly struck with his *extremely graceful and affable manners*, so opposite to what I had expected from the reputation given him, and which painted him as *morose, gloomy*, almost *cynical*." *

"I took leave of him," writes Mr. Finlay, who was presented to Lord Byron at Cephalonia, "quite enchanted, charmed to find a great man so agreeable." †

Colonel Stanhope, afterwards Lord Harrington, who had been sent to Greece by the committee, and who only knew Lord Byron a few months before his death, notwithstanding great discrepancies of idea and character, says frankly, *that with regard to social relations, no one could ever have been so agreeable*; that there was no pedantry or affectation about him, but, on the contrary, that he was like a child for simplicity and joyousness.

"In the evening all the English, who had not, like Colonel Stanhope, turned Odysseans, assembled at his house, and till late at night enjoyed the charm of

* Appendix to Parry's work. † Ibid., p. 210.

his conversation. His character *so much differed from what I had been induced to imagine from the relations of travellers*, that either their reports must have been inaccurate, or his character must have totally changed after his departure from Genoa. It would be difficult, indeed impossible, to convey an idea of the pleasure his conversation afforded. Among his works that which may perhaps be more particularly regarded as exhibiting the mirror of his conversation, and the spirit which animated it, is 'Don Juan.' The following lines from Shakespeare seem as if prophetically written for him :—

> "Biron they call him; but a merrier man,
> Within the limits of becoming mirth,
> I never spent an hour's talk withal:
> His eye begets occasion for his wit;
> For every object that the one doth catch,
> The other turns to a mirth-moving jest;
> While his fair tongue (conceit's expositor)
> Delivers in such apt and gracious words,
> That aged ears play truant at his tales,
> And younger, hearing, are quite ravished;
> So sweet and voluble is his discourse."—*Shakespeare.*

Millingen says :—

"His wonderful mnemonic faculties, the rich and varied store with which he had furnished his mind, his lively, brilliant, and ever-busy imagination, his deep acquaintance with the world, owing to his sagacious penetration, and the advantageous position in which, through his birth and other circumstances, he had been placed, conjoined to the highly mercurial powers of his wit, rendered his conversation peculiarly interesting; enhanced, too, as it was by the charm of his fascinating manners. Far from being the surly, taciturn misanthrope generally imagined, I

always found him dwelling on the lightest and merriest subjects; carefully shunning discussions and whatever might give rise to unpleasing reflections. Almost every word with him was a jest; and he possessed the talent of passing from subject to subject with a lightness, an ease, and a grace, that could with difficulty be matched. Communicative to a degree that astonished us, and might not unfrequently be termed indiscretion, he related anecdotes of himself and his friends which he might as well have kept secret."

Several persons, influenced by the stories circulated against Lord Byron, asked Dr. Kennedy whether his manners and exterior did not give the idea of a demon incarnate. "Quite the contrary," replied Kennedy, "*his appearance and manners give the idea of a man with an excellent heart, both benevolent and feeling, and he has an amiable, sympathetic physiognomy.* The impression he made on me was that of a man of refined politeness and great affability, united to much gaiety, vivacity, and benevolence. His cordial affability even went so far that one was often obliged to recall his rank and fame, in order not to be involuntarily led away by his manner into too great familiarity with him."*

A short time after Lord Byron's death, one of the first English reviews published an article on him, entitled, 'Personal Character of Lord Byron.' It was written by a personage who had had several occasions, during Lord Byron's last sojourn in Greece, of observing his habits, feelings and opinions. Though often jealous of Lord Byron's influence in the country,

* See Kennedy.

nevertheless, when he could get rid of these bad feelings, he expressed himself with tolerable justice :—

"Lord Byron's demeanour," says he, "was perhaps the most affable and courteous I ever met with."

When he was in a good humour, and desirous to be on fair terms with any one, there was a great charm, an irresistible fascination in his manner. Though very gentle it was always gay, with an air of great frankness and generosity, qualities most real in him. "Lord Byron," he adds, "was known for a sort of poetic misanthrope; but that existed much more in public imagination than in reality. He liked society, and was extremely kind and amiable, when calm. Instead of being gloomy, he was, on the contrary, of a very gay disposition, and was fond of jesting; it even amused him to witness comic scenes, such as quarrels between vulgar buffoons, to make them drink, or lead them on in any other way to show their drolleries. In his writings, certainly, he loved to paint a character more or less the work of his imagination, and which therefore was assigned to himself by public opinion : that is, a proud, haughty being, despising all men, and disgusted with the human species. His liking for bandits and pirates may have sprung from some tendencies of his nature, some circumstances in his life; *but there was not the smallest resemblance between the poet and the corsair.* Lord Byron's heart was full of kindness and generosity, he took pride in splendid acts of beneficence : to change the position of some among his fellow-men, and make them exchange misery for unexpected good fortune, was for him the dearest exercise of his faculties. No one

ever sympathised more deeply with the joys he could create."

The same biographer remarks that one great error of Lord Byron's youth was to count upon gratitude and devotedness proportionate to his own, and that most of his accusations against human nature originate with this mistake. And then he adds:—

"But his sentiments, in accordance with his nature, far from obeying the false direction his prejudices and erroneous opinions would have given, always made him, on the contrary, love his fellow-men with a warmth that quite excluded misanthropy. Still this natural ardour rendered him extremely sensitive to neglect from those he loved, especially in early youth, when he was led by the fault of an individual to generalise blame against mankind. He relates somewhere, with merited contempt, that one of his friends would accompany a female relative to her milliner, instead of coming to take leave of him when he was about to leave England for a long time. The truth is that *no one ever loved his neighbour as much as Lord Byron.* Sympathy, respect, affection, attention, were perpetual wants with him. He was really disgusted and sad when they failed him. But then he did not reason much, he only felt like a poet. It was his business to feed all these discontents, for the public likes nothing so much in poetry as disdain, contempt, derision, indignation, and particularly a kind of proud mockery, which forms the line of transition from or distinguishes a disordered state of imagination from madness. Consequently, seeing that this sort of tone pleased the public, when he began to write again he encouraged that style,

his first care being to collect, like Jupiter, the darkest clouds."

The same biographer also tries to insinuate that the romantic interest excited by a handsome young man, full of melancholy and mystery, may have influenced Lord Byron's choice of heroes in his early poems; for, says he, it is not every one who can be weary of the most exquisite enjoyments of society, and to be thus sated a man must have been greatly prized by beauty and wealth. These reflections and explanations are arbitrary, and not impartial. But even if Lord Byron, at twenty-one years of age, did borrow ideas and sentiments not really his, by way of producing poetic effect, we must nevertheless acknowledge that, even in this order of sentiments, part still were genuine and real. Like all young men, Lord Byron had entered the world armed with the notions preceptors deem it necessary to inculcate on their disciples regarding generosity, disinterestedness, liberty, honour, patriotism, &c. When he saw that almost all he had thus been taught was mere illusion, a theme for declamation, and that people in the world very rarely act on such principles; then, no doubt, with his exquisite sensibility, and elevated standard of ideal, he must have felt himself more disgusted than any one else, and must have believed he had a right to despise the human race. Especially would this have been the case after he had personally suffered from cruel satire, from the conduct of his relative and guardian, Lord Carlisle, from the lightness of a few women, and the lukewarmness of some few friends. But, while owing to this fault in education, many young men subjected to like trials become

sensualists, and others, convinced of the falsities that have been inculcated on them, conclude there is no better system of morality than to seek after place, power, and profit, and become voluntary instruments in the hands of the world's oppressors, Lord Byron's soul revolted at it. Too noble by nature to stoop, and confiding also in his genius, he became a poet with a slight tinge of misanthropy in his mind but that could never reach unto his heart, that never modified his amiability in society, and which, at a later period, when experience of life made him reflect more on the nature of his own sentiments and the weakness of humanity, became transformed into a sweet philosophy, full of indulgence for every human defect. This generous disposition is to be found at the base of all his poems written in Italy.

Another reproach brought against Lord Byron is that he did not paint the good side of human nature. People showed as much indignation at this as if he had betrayed some secret, or calumniated some innocent person. A wondrous susceptibility, assuredly, with regard to the imperfections of our common nature, as tardy as strange. One would think, in reading the reproaches addressed to Lord Byron, that those who made them had quite forgotten how, from all time and in all languages, since man commented on man, our poor human nature has not generally been treated with much respect. Putting to one side moralists, and still more pessimists, have not the Holy Scriptures and all the Fathers of the Church, used the most mortifying language concerning the perversity and corruption of our species? As regards complaints and avowals humiliating for our nature,

could there be any more eloquent than those of St. Augustine? Did not Pascal almost wish man to understand that *he is an incomprehensible monster?* Lord Byron would not have called man a *monster;* but, shocked at his pride, he would willingly have said with Pascal, "If he raises himself, I will lower him; if he abuses himself, I will raise him up." In his drama of 'Cain,' where Lucifer is conducting Cain through space and worlds, "Where is Earth?" asks Cain. "'Tis now beyond thee, less in the universe than thou in it," answers Lucifer. Byron always wished to make man feel his littleness. It is true that, while saying the same thing, a notable difference exists between Lord Byron's thought and that of great Christian souls, who humble man in order to make him see that his sole hope is in supernatural power. Lord Byron follows the same road, but his starting point and his goal are not the same. When Lord Byron humbles man, it proceeds from a soul-felt want of truth and justice. He sought truth by a natural law of his mind, expressed it unflinchingly, and thus yielded a pleasure to his heart and understanding. But if the impulse that sometimes provoked his severe or contemptuous words was not the sublime one of Christian orthodoxy, that sees no remedy for human depravity save in God alone, it was still farther off from belonging to the school of the pessimists, of La Rochefoucault in particular, who, content with asserting evil, neither saw nor sought for a remedy anywhere. Lord Byron never despaired of mankind. In early youth, especially, he thought,—not like a Utopist, or even a poet, but like a sensible, humane, generous

man, who deems that many of the evils that afflict his species, morally and physically, might be alleviated by better laws, under whose influence more goodness, sincerity, and real virtue might be substituted for the hypocrisy and other vices that now deprave our nature. Lord Byron saw in many vices and littlenesses the work of man rather than of nature. It was man corrupted by society, rather than by nature, that he condemned.

If religious hopes did not furnish him with an escape from the cruel sentence, philosophical hopes saved him from being overwhelmed by it. Was that an error?—an illusion? In any case, it was a noble one; sufficient to raise up an insurmountable barrier between him and La Rochefoucault. For a time, it is true, in his first youth, he also seemed to be under the prestige La Rochefoucault exercised over so many minds, through his 'Maxims.' The elegant manner in which they were written, the clever tone of observation they displayed, boldly laying down the result in the shape of axioms, was well calculated to lead a youthful mind astray, and make a relative appear an absolute truth. For a while, Lord Byron also seemed to confound the self-love that merges into real hateful egotism, with that which constitutes the principle of life, and which, under the influence of heart and intelligence, claims the high name of virtue. He seemed to doubt of many things, and to be uneasy at the best impulses of his heart. We may remember that he accused himself of selfishness, because he took pleasure in the exercise of amiable virtues. But then that was only the passing error of a youthful mind, filled with an ideal of excellence

too high for reality, and therefore coming into rude contact with deceptions and sorrows. In those days, recalling the fine pictures of life and mankind that had been presented to him as realities, especially at his first onset, and perceiving how different things actually were, seeing men pursue their fellow men, and ascribe vices to the good, and virtues to the bad, not even finding in his friends the qualities that distinguished his own heart, indignant at seeing so many persons sought after for their attractions, despite the vices that defaced them, his soul revolted at the sight —saddened too—and he exclaimed, sorrowfully, in his Memoranda :—" *Yes, La Rochefoucault is right.*"

An illusion might find place in Lord Byron's mind, but it could not last; and if people will read with attention what he has written, they will soon understand the great difference existing between him and the author of the 'Maxims.' Without even speaking of that which separates prose from poetry, an axiom from a hasty expression, grave from gay, maxims from satire, the difference is still enormous. Lord Byron had not received from nature, any more than the author of the 'Maxims,' the gift of seeing things in a roseate hue. On the contrary, from his habit of profound observation, he too often saw them enveloped in sombre colours. But, on the other hand, he had received such a great gift of perspicacity and exactness that things false and fictitious could no more resist his glance than fog can resist the rays of the sun. La Rochefoucault is certainly an admirable painter, but he never takes a likeness otherwise than by profile. Just as our satellite turns round our planet, only showing us its volcanoes and calcined

summits, and leaving us in ignorance of the other side; just so did La Rochefoucault turn around human nature. It only showed him one side,—the most barren and most unhealthy, and that alone did he describe. Still, his description is made with such art and nicety, and has so much charm about it, that it appears correct at first sight, and, indeed, so it is relatively; but, nevertheless, by dint of omission and generalisation, it is false, since it would fain impose a part upon us for the whole. In his voyage of exploration through the windings of the human heart the author of the 'Maxims' stops midway, and comes back over the same ground. It would appear as if his mind lacked strength to go through more than half the circle of truth. But Lord Byron, through the vigour and elasticity of his faculties, after having penetrated into the dark regions where only evil is perceived, and gone through the whole circle, raised himself up into that pure, serene atmosphere where goodness and virtue inhabit, and he also could say, with Dante, coming out of the last infernal circle,—

"Alfin tornammo a riveder le stelle."

La Rochefoucault always rails against mankind, without ever finding out any good. Lord Byron, on the contrary, sees both good and evil. He points out the latter, often sadly, and sometimes with light jests; but he is always happy to acknowledge seriously the existence of good, and to proclaim that, despite all hindrances, beautiful souls do exist, practising all kinds of virtue; thus proving that, however rare, virtue to him is still a reality, and no illusion. If, in his burlesque, satirical poems, wishing especially to

stigmatise vice in high quarters, he has painted wicked women and queens (Catherine and Elizabeth), did he not likewise refresh our souls with the enchanting portraits of Angiolina (the wife of Faliero), and of Josephine (the wife of Werner). If he made merry at the expense of coquettish, weak, hypocritical women (like Adeline, for instance), has he not consoled us by painting, in far greater number, angels of loving devotedness, like Myrrha, Adah, Medora, Haidée, and in general all his delightful female creations? Are not all his heroes even, more or less, constant, devoted, ready to sacrifice everything to the sincerity of their feelings. Devoted love, continued even in the heart of Cain towards his Adah. In 'Heaven and Earth' the angels gave up celestial happiness, and exposed themselves to every evil, in order not to abandon those who loved them. Don Juan himself loved unselfishly. Bitter remembrances, reflections arising from the conduct of friends, made him, *it is true*, doubt the existence of friendship, generalise, blame sometimes, and write those fine stanzas in the fourteenth canto of 'Don Juan':—

"Without a friend, what were humanity,
To hunt our errors up with a good grace?
Consoling us with—"Would you had thought twice!
Ah! if you had but follow'd my advice!"

XLVIII.

"O Job! you had two friends: one's quite enough,
Especially when we are ill at ease;
They're but bad pilots when the weather's rough,
Doctors less famous for their cures than fees.
Let no man grumble when his friends fall off,
As they will do like leaves at the first breeze:
When your affairs come round, one way or t'other,
Go to the coffee-house, and take another.

XLIX.

"But this is not my maxim: had it been,
Some heart-aches had been spared me: yet I care not—
I would not be a tortoise in his screen
Of stubborn shell, which waves and weather wear not;
'Tis better on the whole to have felt and seen
That which humanity may bear, or bear not;
'Twill teach discernment to the sensitive,
And not to pour their ocean in a sieve.

L.

"Of all the horrid, hideous notes of woe,
Sadder than owl-songs or the midnight blast,
Is that portentous phrase, 'I told you so,'
Utter'd by friends, those prophets of the past,
Who, 'stead of saying what you now should do,
Own they foresaw that you would fall at last,
And solace your slight lapse 'gainst '*bonos mores*,'
With a long memorandum of old stories."

On looking into his own heart, Lord Byron no longer doubted the existence of sincere friendships, devoid of all ironical selfishness, since he wrote that forty-ninth stanza, where he says that such is not his maxim, or his heart would have had less to suffer.

Did he not make love of country incarnate in that admirable type (*the young Venetian Foscari*); too fine a type, perhaps, though historical, to be understood by every one. And did he not, through other types, equally prove his belief in all the noblest, most virtuous sentiments of our soul? In fine, if he recognised littleness in man, he recognised greatness likewise. All his writings, as well as his conduct through life, belied continuously and broadly a few poetical expressions and mystifications which drew down upon him, in common with other calumnies, that of having unjustly accused humanity. As to the misanthropy of his early youth, it was of so slight a nature that it only passed through his mind, and occasionally rested on his pen; but it always evaporated in

words, and especially in his verses. For his life and actions ever showed that such a sentiment was foreign to his nature.

And since its attacks* always took place under the pressure of some great injustice, some excess of suffering imposed by the strong on the weak and inoffensive, we must also add that there was in this pretended misanthropy more real goodness and humanity than in all the elegies, songs, meditations, Messenian odes, &c., of all those who blamed him.

Having studied Lord Byron at all periods of his life, in his relations with society, and in his love of solitude, we have seen him alternately placed in contact with others, and then more directly with himself; now correcting the inconveniences that flow from solitude, by seeking the amusements of youth and society, and then making solitary meditation follow on the useful field of observation sought in the world, and thus he drew profit from both, without ever suffering himself to be exclusively engrossed by one or the other. The enervating atmosphere of drawing-rooms remained innocuous for him; he came out from them with a mind as virile and independent as if he had never breathed it, keeping all his ideas strong and bold, just and humane, as they were before. But the consequences of this rare equilibrium, which he was enabled to maintain between a worldly and a solitary life, were very great, as regarded his fame, if not his happiness; for he gained thereby an experience and a knowledge of the human heart quite wonderful, at an age when the first pages of the Book of Life have in general scarcely been

* See chapter on 'Melancholy.'

read, so that, in perusing his writings, one might imagine that he had already gone through a long career. Lastly, as afterwards not the least trace of this pretended misanthropy remained, he might have repeated what Bernardin de Saint Pierre said of a certain melancholy that we are scarcely ever free from in youth, and which was compared, in his presence, to the small-pox:—"I also have had that malady, but it left no traces behind it."

CHAPTER X.

LORD BYRON'S PRIDE.

Among Lord Byron's biographers, we remark some who doubtless believed it useless to count on success, if their work did not contain a large tribute to human wickedness, and who, seeing it nevertheless impossible to accuse Lord Byron of any vice emanating from heart or soul, gave themselves the pleasure of imagining a host of defects. Besides the faults produced by impetuosity and irritability of temper,—those we have just explained,—they dwell on I know not what exaggerated esteem of himself, and immoderate desire of esteem from others, so as to insinuate that Lord Byron was a prey to pride, ambition, and even vanity.

Though all we have remarked in a general way, with regard to his modesty, might be considered a sufficient response to these accusations, we are willing to take up the theme again, and examine more particularly all these forms of self-love.

To assert that Lord Byron was not at all proud, might cause surprise, so much has been said of his pride confounding the man with the poet, and the poet with the heroes of his creation. But assuredly those who would feel surprise could not have known him or studied his character.

Pride is easily recognised by a thousand traits. It

is one of those serious maladies of soul, whose external symptoms can no more be hidden from moral psychologists than the symptoms of serious physical infirmities can be hidden from physiologists. Now, what says the moralist of the proud man? That he never listens to the counsels of friendship; that every reproach irritates him; that a proud man cannot be grateful, because the burden is too great for him; that he never forgives, makes excuses, or acknowledges his faults, or that he is to blame; that he is extremely reserved and proud in the habits of social life; that he is envious of the goods enjoyed by others, deeming them so much subtracted from his own merits; that hatred towards his rivals fills his heart; finally, that, satisfied with himself almost to idolatry, he is incapable of any moral improvement.

Now, let it be said in all sincerity, what analogy can there be between the proud man and Lord Byron? By his words, his actions, and the testimony of all those who approached him, was not Lord Byron the reverse of all this? Was it he who would have refused the counsels of friendship? turned aside from admonition? been indignant at blame? Let those who think so, only read the accounts of his childhood, his youth, his life of affection, and they will see whether he was not rather the slave of his loving heart; if he did not always give doubly what he had received.

Without even speaking of his childhood, when he was really so charming, of his docility towards his nurses and preceptors, towards good Dr. Glennie at Dulwich, and afterwards, at Harrow, towards the

excellent Dr. Drury; let us consider him at that solemn moment for a boy of eighteen, when he was about to publish his poetic compositions. Did he not burn the whole edition, because a friend whom he respected, disapproved some parts?* See him again accepting the blame of another friend about 'Childe Harold,' and when, before publishing it, yielding to the advice of Dallas and Gifford, he suppressed the stanzas that most pleased him. See him also ceasing to write 'Don Juan,' because the person he loved had expressed disapprobation of it, not even substantiated by reasons.

Was it Lord Byron who would have been incapable of forgiving? Why, the pardon of injuries was, on the contrary, a habit with him, a necessity, his sole vengeance, even when such conduct might appear almost superhuman. It was thus, that when cruelly wounded in his self-love, even more than in his heart, by Lady Byron's behaviour, he wrote that touching 'Farewell,' which might have disarmed the fiercest resentment; and that afterwards, yielding to Madame de Staël's entreaties, he consented to propose a reconciliation, which was refused; and not even that aggravation prevented him from often speaking well of Lady Byron.

Gratitude, that proves such an insupportable load to the proud man, did it not rather seem a happiness to him?

When he had done some wrong, far from refusing to make excuses, was he not the first to think of it, saying that he could not go to rest, with resentment in his heart? While a mere boy, and when

* See what Moore says of this trait in Lord Byron.

he had been wounded in his most enthusiastic feelings by a fortunate rival, Mr. Musters, was not Byron the first to hold out his hand and express regret for the bitterness of a few words?

Far from hiding his faults, and not satisfied with avowing them, did he not magnify them, exaggerate them to such a degree that this generous impulse became a real fault in him?

Far from having been too proud and reserved in his habits of life, have we not seen him reproached with being too familiar?

Did envy or rivalry ever enter into his soul?

And lastly, far from conceiving too much self-satisfaction, far from rendering his own mind the homage characteristic of pride, did not Lord Byron, looking at himself through the weaknesses of other men, constantly depreciate himself?

All the ways in which genius is wont to manifest itself were assuredly alike familiar to him; neither philosophy nor art had any secrets for him. But he only made use of them to produce continual acts of humility instead of pride; saying, that if philosophy were blind, art was no less incapable of fulfilling the aspirations of mind, and realising the ideal beheld in imagination.

His very scepticism, or rather what has been called by this name, affords another great proof of his modesty. "Scepticism," says Bacon, "is the great antagonist of pride."

But, the most striking proof of all, undoubtedly, consists in the improvement of his moral being that was perpetually going on; for, to carry it out, he must have dived into the depths of his secret soul,

sternly and conscientiously, undeterred by the great obstacle to all self-amelioration, namely—pride.

So many facts, in support of the same assertions, are to be found spread through the different chapters of this work, that we forbear to lengthen the present view of Lord Byron's character by adducing any more. Let us sum up by saying, that not only was Lord Byron devoid of pride, but that it would be difficult to find in any man more striking examples of the opposite virtue; unless, indeed, we sought them in souls completely swayed by the sublimest teachings of Christianity.

And yet it is easy to understand how he might be accused of pride. His contempt for opinion, augmenting as he further appreciated its little worth; a certain natural timidity, of which Moore, Galt, and Pigott have all spoken, though without drawing thence the logical inferences; his eagerness to put down the unfounded *ridiculous pretensions of human nature*; his own dignity under misfortune; his magnanimity and passion for independence; all these qualities might easily betray those superficial minds into error, who do not study their subjects sufficiently to discover the truth.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VANITY OF LORD BYRON.

BUT it is incomprehensible that any one should have been found to accuse Lord Byron of vanity. For is not the vain man one who lies in order to appear better and more highly gifted than he really is; who knows full well that the good opinion he so ardently seeks is not what he deserves; who endeavours by every means to attract the attention of others; who flatters in order to be flattered; whose willingness to oblige, whose care and kindness, all flow from interested motives; whose whole character savours of ostentation and show; and who despises humble friends, in order to run after brilliant society and wear borrowed plumes? All these signs indicate vanity. Can a single one be found in Byron's character?

Surely our readers will not have forgotten that, for fear of making himself out better, he always wished to appear worse than he was; that he exaggerated the weaknesses common to most of us, and which everybody else hides, magnifying them into serious faults; that he never flattered others, nor wished to be flattered himself; that he concealed the services he rendered, the good he did; and kept aloof from those in power so as to give himself more to true friendship.

We know besides that his love of *meriting*, rather

than *obtaining*, admiration, went so far as to make undeserved praise quite offensive to him. If eulogiums did not seem to him duly bestowed, his soul, athirst for justice and truth, repelled them indignantly. Blame, or harsh criticism, annoyed him far less than unmerited praise or suffrages obtained through favour or intrigue. At the moment he was about to publish his first poem, 'Childe Harold,' which might naturally be expected to prove the making of his literary reputation, Dallas having given him some advice with a view to gaining popularity, Lord Byron answered :—

"My work must make its way as well as it can; I know I have everything against me, angry poets and prejudices; but if the poem is a *poem*, it will surmount these obstacles, and if *not*, it deserves its fate."

And then, when he discovered that his publisher had been taking steps to obtain the approbation of Gifford, the great critic, he wrote indignantly to Dallas, calling this proceeding of Murray's *a paltry transaction*.

"The more I think, the more it vexes me," said he. "It is bad enough to be a scribbler, without having recourse to such shifts to extort praise or deprecate censure, ... and all without my wish, and contrary to my express desire.*. . . .

"I am angry with Murray: it was a bookselling, back-shop, paltry proceeding. . . . I have written to him as he never was written to before by an author, I'll be sworn."

Why, then, accuse a man of vanity when he never complained of criticism and never solicited praise?

* Letter 68, to Dallas, 17th September, 1811.

Was it on account of some of his tastes, particularly the importance he attached to his superiority in boyish games, in bodily exercises, on those which showed dexterity in swimming, fencing, shooting? But all these tastes were as manly as they were innocent. The really trifling tastes common to the youth of his rank and country Lord Byron did not share.

It has also been said that he attached far too much importance to his noble birth. *Much*, perhaps; *too much*, by no means. His ancestors were all illustrious. They were illustrious for their military exploits, and were already nobles in France when they shared the dangers and successes of William the Conqueror; they had followed their kings to Palestine; seven brothers bearing the name of Byron had fought on the same battle-field, and four fell there in defence of their true sovereign and their new country. By his mother he was descended from the kings of Scotland. "Nothing is nobler," says a moralist of our day, "than to add lustre to a great name by our own deeds."

Many of his early compositions testify to the desire he felt of increasing the fame that belonged to his family. For instance, in the poem written at fourteen, and which is entitled 'Verses composed on leaving Newstead Abbey,' after having sung the valour of his ancestors displayed on the plains of Palestine, in the valley of Crecy, and at Marston, where four brothers moistened the field with their blood, he exclaims:—

"Shades of heroes, farewell! your descendant, departing
From the seat of his ancestors, bids you adieu!
Abroad, or at home, your remembrance imparting
New courage, he'll think upon glory and you.

* * * * * *

Far distant he goes, with the same emulation,
The fame of his fathers he ne'er can forget.

"That fame and that memory still will he cherish;
He vows that he ne'er will disgrace your renown:
Like you will he live, or like you will he perish."

1803.

The same sentiments appear in other poems, and particularly in the 'Elegy on Newstead,' written at sixteen. His wish of adding fresh lustre to the family name was all the stronger because the last lord, his great uncle, had somewhat blemished it by his eccentric conduct.

But there is a vast difference between this just feeling of pride and the vanity that leads to exultation in mere titles of nobility, which often owe their origin to the favour of princes. Besides, although Lord Byron was aristocratic by birth, and in his every instinct and taste, he was nevertheless truly liberal on principle and through virtue, in politics as well as in private life; for he always admitted into his affections those who possessed fitting qualities of head and soul, without any consideration of their birth.

After having studied Lord Byron's character under the headings of pride and vanity, we must now examine him with regard to ambition: a third form of self-love, which, though separated from the other two by scarcely perceptible shades, and even being often confounded with them, so as to appear one and the same feeling, does not, however, less retain its permanent and distinguishing traits.

Was Lord Byron ambitious?

"Ambitious men must be divided into three classes,"

says Bacon; "some seek only to raise themselves, forming a common and despicable species; others, with like intent, make the elevation of country enter into the means they employ; this is a nobler ambition, one more refined, and perhaps more violent; lastly, others embrace the happiness and glory of all men in the immensity of their projects. . . . Ambition is, then, sometimes a vice, and sometimes a virtue."

That Lord Byron's ambition did not range him among either of the two first classes was abundantly proved by the actions of his whole life; and as to his writings, letters, or poetic works, we should vainly seek a single word in them that could be attributed to any low ambition.

An ambitious man has generally been an ambitious child. Now, according to unanimous and competent testimony, Lord Byron was not an ambitious child. The usual emulation founded on ambition had no effect on his progress. All his advancement proceeded from heart and imagination. It was his heart, as we have seen, that made him take his pen in hand, that dictated his first verses; and he was likewise actuated by the need and the pleasure of trying and exercising the strength of his intellectual faculties, of keeping up the sacred fire that warmed his breast, and appeasing his ardent thirst after truth. We have given too many proofs of all this to require to insist upon it any further.

We have also seen that it was disagreeable to him to be admired and praised without having merited it. He felt the same repugnance to seeking for popularity. When 'Childe Harold' appeared, Dallas ad-

vised him to alter some passages, because, he said, certain metaphysical ideas expressed in the poem might do him harm in public opinion, and that, at twenty-three years of age, it was well to court in an honourable way the suffrages of his countrymen, and to abstain from wounding their feelings, opinions, and even their prejudices.* Lord Byron replied :—

"I feel that you are right, but I also feel that I am sincere, and that if I am only to write *ad captandum vulgus*, I might as well edit a magazine at once, or concoct songs for Vauxhall." †

And yet when he wrote thus to Dallas he had not arrived at any popularity.

Soon, however, it came to him unsought; but he did not appreciate it nor flatter it to stay, as an ambitious man would not have failed to do. On the contrary, his noble independence of character and incapacity for flattering the multitude gained strength every day. Proofs of the same abound at every period of his life.

"If I valued fame," he said in his Memoranda, 1813, "I should flatter received opinions, which have gathered strength by time, and which will last longer than any living works that are opposed to them. But, for the soul of me, I cannot and will not give the lie to my own thoughts and doubts, come what may. If I am a fool, I am, at least, a doubting one; and I envy no one the certainty of his self-approved wisdom."

And then, at the same time, he wrote :—

"If I had any views in this country they would probably be parliamentary. But I have no ambition;

* Dallas, Letter 45.

† Lord Byron to Dallas, Letter 66; Moore, vol. ii.

at least, if any, it would be '*aut Cæsar aut nihil*.' My hopes are limited to the arrangement of my affairs, and settling either in Italy or in the East (rather the last), and drinking deep of the language and literature of both."

The catastrophe that overtook Napoleon, his hero, and the success of fools, quite overcame him at this time :—

"Past events have unnerved me, and all I can now do is to make life an amusement and look on while others play. After all, even the highest game of crosses and sceptres, what is it? *Vide* Napoleon's last twelvemonth," &c., &c.

The following year (1814), when political feeling ran so high against him as to threaten his popularity on account of the lines addressed to the Princess Charlotte, which had offended the Regent, who had just gone over from the Whigs to the Tories, Byron wrote to Rogers :—

"All the sayings and doings in the world shall not make me utter one word of conciliation to anything that breathes. I shall bear what I can, and what I cannot I shall resist. The worst they could do would be to exclude me from society. I have never courted it, nor, I may add, in the general sense of the word, enjoyed it—and 'there is a world elsewhere.'"

When once he had quitted England his indifference to popularity and its results further increased. He wrote from Venice to Murray :—

"I never see a newspaper, and know nothing of England, except in a letter now and then from my sister" (1816).

But that did not at all suit his publisher, who set about sending him reviews, criticisms, and keeping him up to all that was going on in the literary and political world, thinking thus to stimulate and keep alive the passions that kindle genius. Then it was that Lord Byron, considering this intellectual régime unwholesome for mind and heart, signified to Murray that their correspondence could not continue unless he consented to *six* indispensable conditions. We regret not being able to give the whole of this beautiful letter, circumscribed as we are by certain necessary limits. Thus we shall only quote what more particularly relates to our subject:*—

"I have been thinking over our late correspondence, and wish to propose to you the following articles for our future:—

"1st. That you shall write to me of yourself, of the health, wealth, and welfare of all friends; but of *me* (*quoad me*) *little or nothing.*

"2ndly. . . . . .

"3rdly. . . . . .

"4thly. That you send me no periodical works whatsoever, no 'Edinburgh,' 'Quarterly,' 'Monthly,' or any review, magazine, or newspaper, English or foreign, of any description.

"5thly. That you send me no opinion whatsoever, either *good*, *bad*, or *indifferent*, of yourself, or your friends, or others, concerning any work of mine, past, present, or to come.

"6thly. . . . If anything occurs so violently gross or personal as requires notice, Mr. Kinnaird will let me know; but of praise I desire to hear nothing.

* See Moore, Letter 456.

"You will say, 'To what tends all this?' I will answer—to keep my mind free, and unbiassed by all paltry and personal irritabilities of praise or censure; to let my genius take its natural direction. All these reviews, with their praise or their criticism, have bored me to death, and taken off my attention from greater objects."

Byron wished, he said, to place himself in the position of a dead man, knowing nothing and feeling nothing of what is done and said about him.* At the same time he gave the greatest proof of the reality of the sentiments expressed in this letter by continuing to stay at Ravenna, where people were ignorant of his language, his genius, and his reputation, and where consequently he could only be remarked and appreciated for his external gifts and his deeds of benevolence. When he went from Ravenna to Pisa, Murray, who had not been discouraged by the six conditions, and who was really attached to Lord Byron more as a friend even than as a publisher, became alarmed at the angry feeling stirred up by 'Cain,' the 'Vision of Judgment,' 'Don Juan,' &c., and feared seeing him lose his popularity. So he wrote begging him to compose something in his first style which had excited such general enthusiasm. But Lord Byron answered:—

"As to 'a poem in the old way,' I shall attempt of that kind nothing further. I follow the bias of my own mind, without considering whether women or men are or are not to be pleased."

His whole conduct in Greece was one long act of abnegation, of disinterested and sublime self-devotion.

* See Moore, Letter 456 (Ravenna, 24th September, 1821).

Let people read Parry, Gamba, even Stanhope.* He sacrificed for Greece all his revenue, his time, pleasures, comforts, even life itself, if necessary, and at the age of thirty-five; and then, after success, he refused every honour, satisfied with having deserved them.

"My intentions with regard to Greece," said he to Parry, at Missolonghi, "may be explained in a few words. I will remain here until Greece either throws off the Turkish yoke, or again sinks beneath it. All my revenue shall be spent in her service. All that can be done with my resources, and personally, I will do with my whole heart. But as soon as Greece is delivered from her external enemies, I will leave, without taking any part in the interior organization of the government. I will go to the United States of America, and there, if requisite, and they like it, be the agent for Greece, and endeavour to get that free and enlightened government to recognise the Greek federation as an independent State. England would follow her example; and then the destiny of Greece would be assured. She would take the place that belongs to her as a member of Christendom in Europe."

One day, at Missolonghi, a Prussian officer came to complain to Lord Byron, saying, that his *rank* would not allow him to remain under command of Mr. Parry, who was his inferior both in a civil and military capacity, and consequently that he was going to retire. After having done all he could to bring the German to more reasonable sentiments,

* See his 'Life in Italy.'

after having even joked him on his quarterings of nobility, and the folly of wishing to introduce such prejudices into a country like Greece, Lord Byron did not scruple adding :—

" As to me, I should be quite willing to serve as a simple soldier, in any corps, if that were considered useful to the cause."

But if Lord Byron's absence of ambition under the two first categories, as established by Bacon, is well proved ; the same cannot be said with regard to the third. To deny it would be not only contrary to truth, but especially would it be contrary to all justice ; for the third order of ambition ceases to be a fault ; it is the love of glory, and, according to Bacon, that is a virtue. At least, it is a quality pertaining to noble minds ; and could it, then, be wanting in Lord Byron ? He had always had a presentiment that glory would not fail him. But he was not satisfied with obtaining it, his special wish was to *deserve* it with just and undeniable right. While yet a child in his fourteenth year, he wrote, in

A FRAGMENT.

" When to their airy hall my fathers' voice
Shall call my spirit
* * * * * *
Oh ! may my shade behold no sculptured urns
To mark the spot where earth to earth returns !
No lengthen'd scroll, no praise-encumber'd stone ;
My epitaph shall be my name alone :
If *that* with honour fail to crown my clay,
Oh ! may no other fame my deeds repay !
That, only *that*, shall single out the spot ;
By that remember'd, or with that forgot."

Another time, replying in verse to a poetic com-

position of one of his comrades which spoke of *the common lot of mortals as lying in Lethe's wave*, Lord Byron, after some charming couplets, ends thus :—

"What, though the sculpture be destroy'd,
From dark oblivion meant to guard;
A bright renown shall be enjoy'd
By those whose virtues claim reward.

"Then do not say the common lot
Of all lies deep in Lethe's wave;
Some few, who ne'er will be forgot,
Shall burst the bondage of the grave."

Several other compositions belonging to the same period prove that this child, who was so unambitious, and devoid of the usual sort of emulation, did, however, desire to excel in great and virtuous things. In his adieu to the seat of his ancestors, he says, that,—

"Far distant he goes, with the same emulation,
The fame of his fathers he ne'er can forget.
That fame, and that memory still will he cherish;
He vows that he ne'er will disgrace your renown:
Like you will he live, or like you will he perish."

And when the Rev. Mr. Beecher, his friend and guide during the college vacation passed at Southwell, reproached him with not going enough into the world, young Byron answered, that retirement suited him better, but that when his boyhood and years of trial should be over, if the senate or the camp claimed his presence, he should endeavour to render himself worthy of his birth :—

"Oh! thus, the desire in my bosom for fame
Bids me live but to hope for posterity's praise;
Could I soar with the phœnix on pinions of flame,
With him I could wish to expire in the blaze."

But the fame to which he aspired was not literary

fame. Garlands weaved on Mount Parnassus had no perfume for him, and to seek after them would have appeared in his eyes a frivolous, unmeaning pastime. This severe and unjust judgment, this sort of antipathy, could they have been a presentiment of the dangers with which the glory obtained by literary fame threatened his repose? However that may be, it is certain that he endured rather than sought after it; and we may be equally sure that the glory to which his soul aspired was such as could be reaped in the senate, the camp, or amid the difficulties of an active, virtuous life. At sixteen he wrote:—

> "For the life of a Fox, of a Chatham the death,
> What censure, what danger, what woe would I brave!
> Their lives did not end when they yielded their breath;
> Their glory illumines the gloom of their grave."
>
> 1806.

We find the following in his examination of conscience, written when he was given up to fashionable London life, and in the heyday of his poetic fame:—

"To be the first man—not the dictator, not the Sylla, but the Washington or the Aristides—the leader in talent and *truth*—is next to the Divinity!" (1813.)

These lines show that he did not feel himself in the position he could have wished to occupy, and that he would fain have achieved other success.

But the destiny that was evidently contrary to his tastes, and which through a thousand circumstances carried him away both from a military and a parliamentary career, to keep him almost perforce in the high walks of literature, was this destiny in accordance at least with his nature? Lord Byron's brilliant début in the senate, and his whole conduct in Greece

when that country was one great military camp, prove certainly that he might have reaped full harvests in other fields, if fate had so allowed. But nevertheless, when we see how prodigious were his achievements, concentrated within the domain of poetry; when we see that, despite himself, despite the resolution he occasionally took of writing no more, that yet, tortured by the energy of his genius, there was no remedy for him but to seize his pen; that he wrote sometimes under the influence of fever; that sleep did not still his imagination, nor travelling interrupt his works; that sorrow did not damp his ardour, nor amusement and pleasure weaken his wondrous energy. When we think that he united to this formidable vigour of genius such a luxuriant poetic vein; that his poems, unrivalled for depth of thought, conciseness, and magic beauty of style, were composed with all the ease of ordinary prose; that he could write them while conversing, interrupt his thread of ideas, and take it up again without difficulty, carry on his theme without previous preparation, not stay his pen except to turn the leaf, not change a single word in whole pages, generally only correcting when the proof-sheets came. When we know that a poem like the 'Bride of Abydos' was written in four nights of a London season, the 'Corsair' in ten days, 'Lara' in three weeks, his fourth Canto of 'Childe Harold' in twenty days, the 'Lament of Tasso' in the space of time requisite for going from Ferrara to Florence; the 'Prisoner of Chillon' by way of pastime during the day bad weather forced him to spend at an hotel on the borders of the Lake of Geneva; when we know that he wrote the 'Siege of Corinth' and

'Parisina' amid the torments caused by his separation, and when besieged with creditors; that at Ravenna, in the space of one year, while torn by many sorrows, and annoyed by conspiracies, though he generously aided the conspirators, he yet found leisure to write 'Marino Faliero,' the 'Foscari,' 'Sardanapalus,' 'Cain,' the 'Vision of Judgment,' and many other things; that the 5th Act of 'Sardanapalus' was the work of forty-eight hours, and the 5th Act of 'Werner' of one night; that during another year passed between Pisa and Genoa, in the midst of annoyances, sorrows, perpetual changes, he wrote ten cantos of 'Don Juan, his admirable mystery of 'Heaven and Earth,' his delightful poem of the 'Island,' the 'Age of Bronze,' &c. When we see all that, it must be acknowledged that if Lord Byron, in devoting himself to poetry, took a false step for his own happiness, it did not mar the manifestation of his genius. But if the world had cause to applaud, he did not share this sentiment. It might almost be said that he always wrote unwillingly; and certainly it may be added that fame never inspired him with vanity. That noble desire might, doubtless, have made his heart beat for a while; but it yielded to his philosophical spirit. If at twenty-six, being repelled from public business by the political bias of the day, and from a military career by other circumstances, he could write in his Memoranda "I am not ambitious," how much more disposed did he feel to renounce every kind of ambition two years later, when he was leaving England, full of disgusts, and having sounded all the depths of the human soul.

"The wise man is cured of ambition by ambition

itself," says La Bruyère; "he tends towards such great things that he cannot confine himself to what are called treasures, high posts, fortune, and favour. He sees nothing in such poor advantages *good* or *solid* enough to fill *his heart*, to deserve his cares and desires; and it even requires strong efforts for him not to disdain them too much. The only good capable of tempting him is that sort of fame which ought to be the meed of pure, simple virtue; but men are not wont to give it, and he is fain to go without it."

The only advantage Lord Byron wished to derive from his reputation was to render it subservient to his heart—the true focus of his noble existence. Even in the first days of youth, when his pulses beat strongly for glory, it is evident that he would make it tributary to heart—a means rather than an end. But this became more and more conspicuous when he had really attained to fame. In Italy especially he had become quite indifferent to the pompous praise accorded by reviews, while a single word emanating from the heart made an impression on him, ofttimes causing tears to start. He wrote to Moore from Ravenna, in 1821:—

"I have had a curious letter to-day from a girl in England (I never saw her), who says she is given over of a decline, but could not go out of the world without thanking me for the delight which my poesy for several years, &c., &c., &c. It is signed simply N. N. A., and has not a word of 'cant' or preachment in it upon my opinions. She merely says that she is dying, and that, as I had contributed so highly

to the pleasure of her existence, she thought that she might say so, begging me to *burn* her *letter*—which, by the way, I can *not* do, as I look upon such a letter in such circumstances as better than a diploma from Gottingen.

"I once had a letter from Drontheim, in Norway (but not from a dying woman), in verse, on the same score of gratulation. These are the things which make one at times believe oneself a poet."*

And in 'Detached Thoughts,' which he wrote at Ravenna, we find :—

"A young American, named Coolidge, called on me not many months ago. He was intelligent, very handsome, and not more than twenty years old, according to appearance; a little romantic—but that sits well upon youth—and mighty fond of poesy, as may be suspected from his approaching me in my cavern. He brought me a message from an old servant of my family (Joe Murray), and told me that he (Mr. Coolidge) had obtained a copy of my bust from Thorwaldsen at Rome, to send to America. I confess I was more flattered by this young enthusiasm of a solitary trans-Atlantic traveller, than if they had decreed me a statue in the Paris Pantheon (I have seen emperors and demagogues cast down from their pedestals even in my own time, and Grattan's name razed from the street called after him in Dublin); I say that I was more flattered by it, because it was *simple, unpolitical, and was without motive or ostentation*, the pure and warm feeling of a boy for the poet he admired."

* Letter 436, Moore.

The lines written on the road between Ravenna and Pisa, scarcely two years before his death, beginning with—

"Oh, talk not to me of a name great in story,"

would alone suffice to prove that his love of fame had both its source and its sole gratification in his heart. These charming verses end thus:—

III.

"Oh FAME!—if I e'er took delight in thy praises,
'Twas less for the sake of thy high-sounding phrases,
Than to see the bright eyes of the dear one discover
She thought that I was not unworthy to love her.

IV.

"*There* chiefly I sought thee, *there* only I found thee:
Her glance was the best of the rays that surround thee;
When it sparkled o'er aught that was bright in my story,
I knew it was love, and I felt it was glory."

Some days before setting out for Genoa, while walking in the garden with Countess G——, he went into a retrospective view of his mode of life in England. She, on hearing how he passed his time in London, perceiving what an animated existence it was, so full of variety and occupation, showed some fears lest his stay in Italy, leading such a peaceful, retired, concentrated sort of life, away from the political arena presented by his own country, might entail too great a sacrifice offered on the altar of affection. "Oh, no," said he, "I regret nothing belonging to that great world, where all is artificial, where one cannot live to oneself, where one is obliged to be too much occupied with what others think, and too little with what we ought to think ourselves. What should I have done there? Made some oppo-

sition speeches in the House of Lords, that would not have produced any good, since the prevailing policy is not mine. Been obliged to frequent, without pleasure or profit, society that suits me not. Have had more trouble in keeping and expressing my independent opinions. I should not have met you. . . . Ah, well! I am much better pleased to know you. What is there in the world worth a true affection? Nothing. And if I had to begin over again, I would still do what I have done." When Lord Byron thus unfolded the treasures concealed in his heart, his countenance spoke quite as much as his words.

It was at this same period that he wrote in his drama of 'Werner:'—

> "Glory's pillow is but restless,
> If Love lay not down his cheek there."

And now, to sum up, let us say that, after having considered Lord Byron not only in his actions, and their most apparent motives; not only in the exercise of all his faculties, and in his sentiments sincerely expressed, but that, having likewise confronted him with all the forms of self-love, it is impossible for us to see aught else in him but that legitimate pride belonging to great souls, and the noble passion for glory—sentiments united in him with the peculiar feature of being under control of his affections. Thus, then, when the day came that he was called upon to sacrifice his affections, not only in the name of humanity, but also in the name of his love for glory, which was already a virtue, since he only desired and sought it to become a benefactor of mankind; then, by this new sacrifice, and by that even of life, his

noble passion for glory attained to the height of a sublime virtue.

Although our impartial examination of Lord Byron's faults end really in demonstrating their absence, let us beware nevertheless of raising him above humanity by asserting that he had none. La Bruyère thus sums up his portrait of the great Condé:—"*A man who was true, simple, and magnanimous, and in whom only the smallest virtues were wanting.*" This fine sentence may partly apply to Lord Byron also. Only, to be just, we must substitute the singular for the plural. And instead of declaring that the lesser virtues were wanting in him, we must say *one* of the smaller virtues. In truth, he had not that prudence which proposes for our supreme end the preservation of our prosperity, fortune, popularity, tranquillity, health—in a word, of all our goods—and which constitutes Epicurean wisdom. But this virtue is really so mixed up with personality and egotism, that one may hesitate ere granting it the rank of a virtue; and we ought not to be astonished if it were wanting in Lord Byron, for it can with difficulty be found united to great sensibility of heart and great generosity of character. Nevertheless, had he possessed it, his life might have been much happier. Had he possessed it, instead of devoting his revenue and all his literary gains to friends, disappointed authors, and unfortunates of all kinds, he would have kept them for himself; and thus he might have been able to brave almost all the storms of his sad year of married life, when his annoyances were greatly increased by the embarrassed state of his affairs. Had he possessed this prudence, he would not in his boyish

satire have attacked so many powerful persons, nor, at a later period, would he have made to himself idols of truth and justice. He would have spared the powers that be, and respected national prejudices, in order not to draw down on his own head so much rancour and calumny; he would not have given a hold to slander, nor suffered himself to be insulted by being identified with the heroes of his poems; he would not have compromised his fine health by an anchorite's regimen; he would not have depreciated himself; he would have extended to himself the indulgence with which he knew so well how to cloak the faults of others, and instead of confiding to indiscreet companions, as subjects for curiosity and study, adventures somewhat strange, and the usual routine of juvenile follies, he would have profited by the system so current in our day of satisfying inclinations silently and covertly; lastly, and above all, he would not have married Miss Milbank.

All these reproaches are well founded. But if we may say with reason that he wanted prudence for his own interests, we ought at the same time to add *that he never wanted it for the interests of others.* Did we not see him, even in earliest youth, burn writings, or abstain from writing, through excess of delicacy and fear of wounding his neighbours?

"I have burned my novel and my comedy," said he in 1813. "After all, I see that the pleasure of burning oneself is as great as that of printing. These two works ought not to have been published. I fell too much into realities; some persons would have been *recognised*, and others *suspected*."

When he sent Murray his stanzas to the Po, he

forbade him to print it, because it gave intimate details.

His greatest fear at Pisa and Genoa was lest the newspapers should have spoken of his feelings for the Countess G——.

But, without seeking other examples, it suffices to glance at his conduct in Greece, where his prudence formed matter of astonishment to everybody. Monsieur Tricoupi, the best historian of the war of Greek independence, has rendered him the most complete justice on this head.

Let us then sum up by saying that, contrary to what is found in most, even virtuous men, Lord Byron possessed great and sublime virtues in the highest degree, and the lesser ones only in a secondary degree. As to his faults, it is evident they all sprang from his excellent qualities. Endowed with all kinds of genius, except the one of calculating his personal interest, he failed in different ways to discharge his duty towards himself; and though he only harmed himself by his want of prudence, yet was he cruelly punished for it by sorrows, regrets, and even by a fatally premature death.

CHAPTER XII.

LORD BYRON'S MARRIAGE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

LORD BYRON'S marriage exercised such a deplorable influence over his destiny, that it is impossible to speak of it succinctly, and without entering into details; for this one great misfortune proved the fruitful source of all others.

If we were permitted to believe that Providence sometimes abandons men here below to the influence of an evil genius, we might well conceive this baneful intervention in the case of Lord Byron's conjugal union, and all the circumstances that led to it.

It was but a few months after having returned from his travels in the East, that Lord Byron published his first cantos of 'Childe Harold,' and obtained triumphs as an orator in the House of Lords. Presenting himself thus for the first time to the public, surrounded by all the prestige belonging to a handsome person, rank, and youth,—in a word, with such an assemblage of qualities as are seldom if ever found united in one person—he immediately became the idol of England. The enemies created by his boyish satire, and augmented by the jealousy his success could not fail to cause, now hid themselves like those vile insects that slink back into their holes on the first appearance of the sun's rays, ready to creep out again when fogs and darkness return. Living then in the midst of the great world, in the closest intimacy

with many of the fair sex, and witnessing the small amount of wedded happiness enjoyed by aristocratic couples within his observation, intending also to wing his flight eventually towards climes more in unison with his tastes, he no longer felt that attraction for marriage which he had experienced in boyhood (like most youths), and he said, quite seriously, that if his cousin, George Byron, would marry, he, on his part, would willingly engage not to enter into wedlock. But his friends saw with regret that his eyes were still seeking through English clouds the blue skies of the East; and that he was kept in a perpetual agitation by the fair ones who would cast themselves athwart his path, throwing themselves at his head when not at his feet. Vainly did he distort himself, give himself out to the public as a true 'Childe Harold,' malign himself; his friends knew that his heart was overflowing with tenderness, and they could not thus be duped. If he had wished to cull some flowers idly, for the sake of scattering their leaves to the breeze, as youth so often does, this sort of amusement would have been difficult for him, for the fine ladies of his choice, if once they succeeded in inspiring him with some kind of tender feeling, fastened themselves upon him in such a passionate way that his freedom became greatly shackled, and they generally ended by making the public the confidante of their secret.

Lord Byron had some adventures that brought him annoyance and grief. They made him fall into low spirits,—a sort of moral apathy and indifference for everything. His best friends, and the wisest amongst them, thought that the surest way of settling him in

England, and getting him out of the scrapes into which he was being dragged by female enthusiasm, would be for him to marry, and they advised him to it pertinaciously. Lord Byron, ever docile to the voice of affection, did not repel the counsels given, but he made them well understand that he should marry from reason rather than choice; and the letter he wrote, when Moore insisted on his choosing a certain beautiful girl of noble birth,* well explains his whole state of mind at this time:—

"I believe," said he, "that you think I have not been quite fair with that Alpha and Omega of beauty with whom you would willingly have united me. Had Lady —— appeared to wish it, I would have gone on, and very possibly married with the same indifference which has frozen over the Black Sea of almost all my passions. It is that very indifference which makes me so uncertain and apparently capricious. It is not eagerness of new pursuits, but that nothing impresses me *sufficiently* to fix. I do not feel disgusted, but simply indifferent to almost all excitements; and the proof of this is that obstacles, the slightest even, stop me. This can hardly be timidity, for I have done some imprudent things, too, in my time; and in almost all cases opposition is a stimulus.

* "In none of the persons he admired," says Moore, "did I meet with a union of qualities so well fitted to succeed in the difficult task of winning him into fidelity and happiness as in the lady in question. Combining beauty of the highest order with a mind intelligent and ingenuous, having just learning enough to give refinement to her taste, and far too much taste to make pretensions to learning; with a patrician spirit proud as Lord Byron's, but showing it only in a delicate generosity of spirit, a feminine high-mindedness, which would have led her to tolerate the defects of her husband in consideration of his noble qualities and his glory, and even to sacrifice silently her own happiness rather than violate the responsibility in which she stood pledged to the world for his."

In this circumstance it is not; if a straw were in my way I could not stoop to pick it up. I have sent you this long tirade, because I would not have you suppose that I have been trifling designedly with you or others. If you think so, in the name of St. Hubert (the patron of antlers and hunters) *let me be married out of hand, I don't care to whom*, so it amuses anybody else, and don't interfere with me much in the daytime."

But that to which Lord Byron most aspired was always to wing his flight to brighter skies.

"Your climate kills me," he wrote to Hodgson, directly after his return from the East. And then again, "My inclinations and my health make me wish to leave England; neither my habits nor constitution are improved by your customs or your climate. I shall find employment in making myself a good Oriental scholar. I shall buy a mansion in one of the fairest islands, and describe, at intervals, the most interesting portions of the East."

Lord Byron wrote this before he had attained great celebrity; but this did not change either his sentiments or his tastes. Notwithstanding the embarrassments arising from the legacy left him by his great uncle, and which were principally caused by the action brought against him on account of the illegal sale of the Rochdale mines (a suit which Lord Byron gained, but the expenses of which were ruinous), he was nevertheless sufficiently rich to live at ease, to let his needy friends enjoy the profits arising from his works, and to allow himself acts of beneficence and generosity that were the joy of his heart. And when he had done all that, he still found that he could

not spend the surplus in England according to his tastes. After the death of his mother, no longer bound by his promise to her of not selling Newstead, he resolved on effecting the sale so as to settle his affairs definitively. The sale having failed, the forfeit brought him in 25,000*l.*; and he wrote to Moore, in September, 1814 :—

"I shall know to-morrow whether a circumstance, of importance enough to change all my plans, will occur or not.* If it does not, I am off for Italy next month.

"I have a few thousand pounds which I can't spend after my own heart in this climate, and so I shall go back to the south. Hobhouse, I think and hope, will go with me; but whether he will or not, I shall. I want to see Venice and the Alps, and Parmesan cheeses, and look at the coasts of Greece, or rather Epirus, from Italy as I once did, or fancied I did, that of Italy, when off Corfu."

A few days before writing this letter, his evil destiny had led him to take a step fatal to all his future happiness.

A person, for whom he entertained both affection and deference, observing one day how unsettled he appeared in his state of mind and projects for the future, again reiterated, with more earnestness than ever, the advice to marry.

After long discussions Lord Byron promised to do so. But who should be the object of his choice? A young lady was named who seemed to possess all the qualities requisite for giving happiness in marriage.

* This circumstance was his propcsal for Miss Milbank; we shall see presently how it had taken place.

Lord Byron, on his side, suggested Miss Milbank, with whom he was then in correspondence. She was a niece of Lady Melbourne, who had thought of this union a year before; a circumstance which probably decided Lord Byron's preference, for he liked Lady Melbourne very much.

On hearing Miss Milbank's name his friend protested with great energy, begging him to remark, amongst other things, that Miss Milbank had no actual fortune, that his affairs were too much embarrassed for him to be able to marry a woman without money, and moreover that Miss Milbank was a learned lady, a *blue-stocking*, who could not possibly suit him. Ever docile to the voice of friendship, Lord Byron yielded, and allowed his friend to write a proposal to the other lady. Soon after a negative answer arrived, one morning, that the two friends were together.

"You see," said Lord Byron, "that after all it is Miss Milbank I am to marry; I shall write to her!" He did so immediately; and when the letter was finished, his friend feeling more and more opposed to such a choice, took it from him. After having read it, he exclaimed:—

"Truly, this letter is so charming that it is a pity for it not to go. I never read a better effusion." "Then go it shall," replied Lord Byron, who sealed and sent it off, thus signing his own misfortune!

We have said that he was in correspondence with Miss Milbank. This is how he had made her acquaintance.

Two years previously, at a London *soirée*, he saw sitting in the corner of a sofa a young girl whose

simplicity of dress made her look as if she belonged to a less elevated position than most of the other girls in the room; Moore told him, however, that she was a rich heiress, Miss Milbank, and that if he would marry her she might help him to restore the old Abbey of Newstead. Her modest look, in striking contrast with the stiffness and formality common to the aristocracy, interested Lord Byron. He had himself introduced, and some time after ended by asking her to marry him. His proposal, from motives that could not wound him, was not accepted then. But a year later Miss Milbank testified the desire of entering into correspondence with him. Thus the ground was prepared. When he sent his letter with a fresh proposal, it was accepted all the more eagerly that a report had been spread of his wishing to marry a young and beautiful Irish girl, which did not please Miss Milbank. Her answer was couched in very flattering terms, and the fatal marriage was thus decided on. This was perhaps the only time in his life that Lord Byron did not follow the counsels of friendship. It would indeed seem as if an evil genius had taken possession of his will. Warnings were not wanting; but he refused to listen to them. "If you have anything to say against my decision," wrote he to Moore, in his usual jesting way, after the marriage had been agreed on, "I beg you to say it. My resolve is taken, so positively, fixed, and irrevocably, that I can very well listen to reason, since now it can do me no more harm."

And so he married Miss Milbank three months afterwards. During the interval between the promise exchanged and the ceremony concluded, Lord Byron

saw his betrothed frequently. Had he no warning, no inspiration from his good genius during all that time? Had he no fear of such perfection? Did he not feel that a faultless coat of mail, like hers, might so have pressed upon her heart that no pulse would be left giving earnest of life? Might not tenderness, piety, indulgence, forbearance, the most amiable and sublime virtues belonging to a Christian woman, have their place filled in the breast of this perfect creature by another kind of sublimity? and was it not very possible that she would increase by one the number of those chaste wives who judge, condemn, punish, and never forgive anything that does not enter into the category of their virtues, or rather of the single virtue they practise, and under shadow of which they consider themselves able to dispense with all others? Did he not fear that the profound mathematical knowledge of that learned person might have slightly deadened her heart and given a dogmatic tone to her mind, of which he doubtless with his usual penetration suspected the narrowness, likely to render its science pernicious to the heart? All this is easily to be believed, when we see how pre-occupied he was before marriage.

"At the beginning of the month of December, being called up to town by business, I had opportunities, from being a good deal in my noble friend's society, of observing the state of his mind and feelings under the prospect of the important change he was now about to undergo; and it was with pain I found that those sanguine hopes with which I had sometimes looked forward to the happy influence of

marriage, in winning him over to the brighter and better side of life, were, by a view of all the circumstances of his present destiny considerably diminished. While, at the same time, not a few doubts and misgivings, which had never before so strongly occurred to me, with regard to his own fitness, under any circumstances, for the matrimonial tie, filled me altogether with a degree of foreboding anxiety as to his fate, which the unfortunate events that followed but too fully justified."

Lord Byron might still have avoided this misfortune by giving up marriage; but the die was cast. His evil genius presented him with no other alternative than to rush on to the catastrophe.

We must add that if, unfortunately, the halo of perfection supposed to encircle the heiress was calculated to make him tremble, it was also of a nature to flatter his self-love. This reputation was, in the eyes of Moore, the principal cause of his preference for Miss Milbank. However that may be, in the last days of December, accompanied by his friend Mr. Hobhouse, he set out for Seaham, the residence of Sir Ralph, Miss Milbank's father. And on the morning of the 2nd of January, surrounded by visions of the past, by gloomy forebodings, having in his hand the fatal ring that had been dug up in his garden at the moment when Miss Milbank's consent arrived; with a beating heart, and eyes all dizzy, that would have made him draw back, if his honour had not been too far engaged, Lord Byron advanced towards the altar. From that fatal day, if his star of glory did not cease to shine, or even if it shone more

brightly seen through the atmosphere of misfortune, nevertheless repose and lasting happiness were gone for him.

An heiress for a wife, but who had no actual fortune, naturally forced him into great expenses, that soon went beyond his resources. His creditors, lured by the riches said to belong to Miss Milbank, came down upon him, as if the wife's fortune could be used to pay the husband's debts.

His marriage had taken place in January, and already, in October, he was obliged to sell his library. Shortly afterwards his furniture was seized, and he had to undergo humiliations, all the more keenly felt, that they were quite unmerited, since his debts were inherited with the property. Lord Byron —who had a real horror of debt—with his spirit of justice, moderate desires, simple tastes, detached as he was from material enjoyments, and even, perhaps, through pride, would never have fallen into such embarrassments if he had remained *unmarried*. Indeed, his creditors were patiently awaiting the sale of some property. Besides, he was rich enough while unmarried; he could exercise hospitality, travel in good style, not even keep for himself the produce of his works, and, above all, never refuse to perform works of charity and benevolence. He wrote to one of his friends before marriage that his affairs were about to be settled, that he could live comfortably in England, and buy a principality, if he wished, in Turkey.

Thus, then, marriage alone drew upon him this new disaster, which he must have felt severely, and which, doubtless, led him to make reflections little

favourable to the tie so fatally contracted. Then it was that he would have required to meet with kindness, indulgence, and peace at home; thus supported, his heart would have endured everything.

Instead of that, what did he find? A woman whose jealousy was extreme, who had her own settled way of living, and was unflinching in her ideas; who united a conviction of her own wisdom to perfect ignorance of the human heart,* all the while fancying that she knew it so well; who, far from consenting to modify her habits, would fain have imposed them on others. In short, a woman who had nothing in common with him, who was unable to understand him, or to find the road to his heart or mind; finally, one to whom forgiveness seemed a weakness, instead of a virtue. Is it, then, astonishing that he should have suffered in such a depressing atmosphere; that he should sometimes have been irritable, and have even allowed to escape him a few words likely to wound the susceptible self-love of his wife?

Lady Byron possessed one of those minds clever at reasoning, but weak in judgment; that can *reason* much without being *reasonable*, to use the words of a great philosophical moralist of our day; one of those minds that act as if life were a problem in jurisprudence or geometry; who argue, distinguish, and, by dint of syllogisms, *deceive themselves learnedly*. She always deceived herself in this way about Lord Byron.

When she was in the family-way, and her confine-

* "Lady Byron," said Lord Byron at Pisa, "and Mr. Medwin were continually making portraits of me; each one more unlike than the other."

ment drawing near, the storm continued to gather above her husband's head. He was in correspondence with Moore, then absent from London. Moore's apprehensions with regard to the happiness likely to result from an union that had never appeared suitable in his eyes, had, nevertheless, calmed down on receiving letters from Lord Byron that expressed satisfaction. Yet during the first days of what is vulgarly termed the "honeymoon," Lord Byron sent Moore some very melancholy verses, to be set to music, said he, and which begin thus :—

"There 's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away."

Moore had already felt some vague disquietude, and he asked why he allowed his mind to dwell on such sorrowful ideas? Lord Byron replied that he had written these verses on learning the death of a friend of his childhood, the Duke of Dorset, and, as his subsequent letters were full of jests, Moore became reassured. Lord Byron said he was happy, and so he really was; for Lady Byron, not being jealous then, continued to be gentle and amiable.

"But these indications of a contented heart soon ceased. His mention of the partner of his home became more rare and formal, and there was observable, I thought, through some of his letters, a feeling of unquiet and weariness that brought back all those gloomy anticipations which I had, from the first, felt regarding his fate."

Above all, there were expressions in his letters that seemed of sad augury. For instance, in announcing the birth of his little girl, Lord Byron said that he was absorbed in five hundred contradictory

contemplations, although he had only one single object in view, which would probably come to nothing, as it mostly happens with all we desire :—

"But never mind," he said, "as somebody says, '*for the blue sky bends over all.*' I only could be glad if it bent over me where it is a little bluer, like the *skyish top of blue Olympus.*"

On reading this letter, dated the 5th of January, full of aspirations after a blue sky, Moore was struck with the tone of melancholy pervading it; and, knowing that it was Lord Byron's habit when under the pressure of sorrow and uneasiness, to seek relief in expressing his yearnings after freedom and after other climes, he wrote to him in these terms :—

"Do you know, my dear Byron, there was something in your last letter—a sort of mystery, as well as a want of your usual elasticity of spirits—which has hung upon my mind unpleasantly ever since. I long to be near you, that I might know how you really look and feel, for these letters tell nothing, and one word, *a quattr' occhi*, is worth whole reams of correspondence. But only do tell me you are happier than that letter has led me to fear, and I shall be satisfied."

"It was," says Moore, "only a few weeks after the exchange of these letters, that Lady Byron took the resolution of separating from him. She had left London at the end of January, on a visit to her parents, in Leicestershire, and Lord Byron was to come and join her there soon after. They had parted with mutual demonstrations of attachment and of good understanding. On the journey Lady Byron wrote a letter to her husband, couched in

playful, affectionate language. What, then, must have been his astonishment when, directly after her arrival at Kirby Mallory, her father, Sir Ralph, wrote to tell Lord Byron that his daughter was going to remain with them, and would return to him no more."

This unexpected stroke fell heavily upon him. The pecuniary embarrassments growing up since his marriage (for he had already undergone eight or nine executions in his own house), had then reached their climax. He was then, to use his own energetic expression, *alone at his hearth, his penates transfixed around;* and then was he also condemned to receive the unaccountable intelligence that the wife who had just parted from him in the most affectionate manner, had abandoned him for ever.

His state of mind cannot be told, nor, perhaps, be imagined. Still he describes it in some passages of his letters, showing at the same time the firmness, dignity, and strength of mind that always distinguished him. For example, he wrote to Rogers, two weeks after this thunderbolt had fallen upon him:—

"I shall be very glad to see you if you like to call, though I am at present contending with the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,' some of which have struck me from a quarter whence I did not, indeed, expect them; but, no matter, there is a 'world elsewhere,' and I will cut my way through this as I can. If you write to Moore, will you tell him that I shall answer his letter the moment I can muster time and spirits.

Ever yours,

Byron."

This strength of mind he only found a month afterwards, and then he wrote to him :—

"I have not answered your letter for a time, and at present the reply to it might extend to such a length that I shall delay it till it can be made in person, and then I will shorten it as much as I can. I am at war *with all the world and my wife*, or, rather, all the world and my wife are at war with me, and have not yet crushed me, and shall not crush me, whatever they may do. I don't know that in the course of a hair-breadth existence I was ever, at home or abroad, in a situation so completely uprooted of present pleasure, or rational hope for the future, as this time. I say this because I think so, and feel it. But I shall not sink under it the more for that mode of considering the question. I have made up my mind.

"By the way, however, you must not believe all you hear on the subject; but don't attempt to defend me. If you succeeded in that it would be a mortal, or an immortal, offence. Who can bear refutation?" *

And, after having spoken of his wife's family, he concludes in these terms :—

"Those who know what is going on say that the mysterious cause of our domestic misunderstandings is a Mrs. C——, now a kind of housekeeper and spy of Lady N——, who was a washerwoman in former days."

Swayed by this idea, he went so far then in his generosity as to exonerate his wife, and accuse himself; whereupon Moore answered that, "*after all, his*

* Moore, Letter 233.

misfortunes lay in the choice he had made of a wife, which he (Moore) *had never approved.*"

Lord Byron hastened to reply that he was wrong, and that Lady Byron's conduct while with him had not deserved the smallest reproach, giving her, at the same time, great praise. But this answer, which, according to Moore, *forces admiration for the generous candour of him who wrote it, while adding to the sadness and strangeness of the whole affair*—this answer, of such extraordinary generosity, will better find its place elsewhere. It contains expressions that show his real state of soul under the cruel circumstances:—

"I have to battle with all kinds of unpleasantness, including private and pecuniary difficulties, &c.

". . . . It is nothing to bear the *privations* of adversity, or, more properly, ill-fortune, but my pride recoils from its *indignities.* However, I have no quarrel with that same pride, which will, I think, be my buckler through everything. If my heart could have been broken, it would have been so years ago, and by events more afflicting than these. . . . Do you remember the lines I sent you early last year? I don't wish to claim the character of 'Vates' the prophet, but were they not a little prophetic? I mean those beginning: 'There's not a joy the world can,' &c. They were the truest, though the most melancholy, I ever wrote."

To this letter Moore answered immediately:—

"I had certainly no right to say anything about the *unluckiness of your choice,* though I rejoice now that I did, as it has drawn from you a tribute which, however unaccountable and mysterious it renders the whole affair, is highly honourable to both parties.

What I meant in hinting a doubt with respect to the object of your selection, did not imply the least impeachment of that perfect amiableness which the world, I find, by common consent, allows to her. I only feared that she might have been too perfect, too *precisely* excellent, *too matter-of-fact a paragon for you to coalesce with comfortably* . . . . and that a person whose perfection hung in more easy folds about her, whose brightness was softened down by some of 'those fair defects which best conciliate love,' would, by appealing more dependently to your protection, have stood a much better chance with your good nature. All these suppositions, however, I have been led into by my intense anxiety to acquit you of anything like a capricious abandonment of your wife; and, totally in the dark as I am with respect to all but the fact of your separation, you cannot conceive the solicitude—the fearful solicitude—with which I look forward to a history of the transaction from your own lips when we meet—a history in which I am sure of at least one virtue, manly candour."

Those who knew Lord Byron, gifted as he was with so much that seemed to render it impossible for any woman to resign herself to the loss of his love; with so much to make a wife proud of bearing his name; may well ask what strange sort of nature Lady Byron could have possessed to act as she did towards him; and whether, if she really married out of vanity (as Lord Byron one day told Medwin, at Pisa), and her heart being full of pride only, she found some greater satisfaction for her vanity in the courage and perseverance she fancied displayed

in deserting him. But, in order to view her inexplicable conduct with any sort of indulgence, we must say that Lady Byron was an only and a spoilt child, a slave to rule, to habits and ideas as unchanging and inflexible as the figures she loved to study; that, being accustomed to the comforts of a rich house, where she was idolised, she could not do without her regular comforts, so generally appreciated and considered necessary by English people. But it was no easy matter to satisfy all her tastes with mathematical regularity, to let her keep up all her habits, and, above all, to make Lord Byron share them in their married life. In the first place, Lord Byron, who was naturally un-English in taste, had, moreover, through his long stay abroad, given up the peculiarities of English habits. He did not dine every day, and when he did it was a cenobite's meal, little suited to the taste of a true Englishman. He breakfasted on a cup of green tea, without sugar, and the yolk of an egg, which was swallowed standing. The comfortable fireside, the indispensable roast beef, and the regular evening tea, were not appreciated by him; and, indeed, it was a real pain to him to see women eat at all. Not one of his young wife's habits was shared by him. He did not think his soul lost by going to bed at dawn, for he liked to write at night; or by doing other things at what she called irregular hours; and he must have been at least astonished on hearing himself asked, three weeks after marriage, *when he intended giving up his versifying habits?*"

But he did not give them up; nor could he have

done so had he wished it. Lady Byron must have flattered herself with the idea of ruling him, of showing the world her power over her husband. As long as their resources sufficed for a life of luxury, both parties might have cherished illusion, and put off reflection. But when creditors, attracted by the name of the wealthy heiress—who in reality had only brought her expectations with her—began to pour in, and that pecuniary embarrassment and humiliations were added to home incompatibilities, then, perhaps, Lord Byron became irritable sometimes, and Lady Byron must have felt more than ever the painful absence of those comforts whose enjoyment cause many other annoyances to be forgotten. She must often have compared her life then, full of mortifications, and, perhaps, of solitude, with the one so comfortable and agreeable (for her) she formerly led at Kirby Mallory, in the midst of her relatives. Indeed, they had spent two months there, both saying they were happy; for at this period of the honeymoon, Lord Byron, kind as he was, doubtless yielded to all the caprices and habits of his hosts. Nevertheless, through the veil of his customary jests and assurances to Moore that he was quite satisfied, it is easy to see how tired he was, and how little the life at Seaham was suited to him.

"I am in such a state of sameness and stagnation, and so totally occupied in consuming the fruits, and sauntering, and playing dull games at cards, and yawning, and trying to read old 'Annual Registers' and the daily papers, and gathering shells on the shore, and watching the growth of stunted goose-

berry bushes in the garden, that I have neither time nor sense to say more than yours ever,

"Byron."

And then another time he wrote,—

"I have been very comfortable here, listening to that d——d monologue which elderly gentlemen call conversation, and in which my pious father-in-law repeats himself every evening, except when he plays upon the fiddle. However, they have been very kind and hospitable, and I like them and the place vastly."

Again, feeling his thought in bondage at Seaham, when it would fain have wandered free beneath some sunny sky, he wrote to Moore, "By the way, don't engage yourself in any travelling expedition, as I have a plan of travel into Italy, which we will discuss. And then, think of the poesy wherewithal we should overflow from Venice to Vesuvius, to say nothing of Greece, through all which—God willing—we might perambulate."

But on quitting Seaham to return home, without preventing Lady Byron from continuing to follow her own tastes, it is likely that he wished to resume his old habits: his beloved solitude, so necessary to him; his fasts; his hours for study and rest, very different from those of Seaham. And then she must have found it troublesome to have a husband, who was not only indifferent to English comforts, but who even disliked to see women eat! who, despite his embarrassments, continued to refuse appropriating for his own use the money given and offered by his publisher, making it over instead to the poor, and even

borrowing to help his friends and indigent authors.* She could not have known how he would ever get disentangled. Being *extremely jealous*, she became the easy dupe of malicious persons; and under the influence of that wicked woman, Mrs. Claremont, allowed herself to be persuaded that her husband committed grave faults, though in reality they were but slight or even imaginary ones. She forced open his writing-desk, and found in it several proofs of intrigues that had taken place *previous* to his marriage. In the frenzy of her jealousy, Lady Byron sent these letters to the husband of the lady compromised, but he had the good sense to take no notice of them. Such a revolting proceeding on the part of Lady Byron requires no commentary: it cannot be justified. Meanwhile the conjugal abode was given up to bailiffs, and desolation reigned in Lord Byron's soul. He had lately become a father. This was the moment that his wife chose for leaving him; and the first proof of love she gave their daughter, as soon as she set foot in her own home, was to abandon that child's father and the house where she could no longer find the mode of life to which she had been accustomed. At Kirby Mallory, the vindictive Lady Noel, who detested Lord Byron, doubtless did the rest, together with the governess. And the young heiress, just enriched by a legacy inherited from an uncle, thus newly restored to wealth, had not courage to leave it and them all again. With the kind of nature she possessed, she must have taken pride in a sort of exaggerated firmness; thus seeking to gain

* At this time of embarrassment, he borrowed a large sum to give to Coleridge.

strength for trampling under foot all heart-emotions, as if they were so many weaknesses, incompatible with the stern principles that she considered virtues. By assuming the point of view proper to some minds, it is easy to conceive all this, especially when one knows England.

But was it really for the purpose of allowing her to give such a spectacle to the world, and to secure for herself the comforts of life, that God had given to her keeping Lord Byron's noble spirit? Did she forget that it was not simply a good, honest, ordinary man, like the generality of husbands, that she had married; but that Heaven, having crowned his brow with the rays of genius, imposed far other obligations on his companion! Did she forget that she was responsible before God and before that country whose pride he was about to become? Ought she to have preferred an easy life to the honour of being his wife; of sustaining him in his weaknesses; of consoling and forgiving him, if necessary; in short, of being his guardian angel? If she aspired to the reputation of a virtuous woman, could true virtue have done otherwise? Ere this God has judged her above; but, here below, can those possessing hearts have any indulgence for her?

We hear constantly repeated—because it was once said—that men of great genius are less capable than ordinary individuals of experiencing calm affections and of settling down into those easy habits which help to cement domestic life. By dint of repeating this it has become an axiom. But on what grounds is it founded? Because these privileged beings give themselves to studies requiring solitude, in order to

abstract and concentrate their thoughts; because, their mental riches being greater, they are more independent of the outer world and the intellectual resources of their fellow-creatures; because, through the abundance of their own resources, their mind acquires a certain refinement, likely to make them deem the society of ordinary persons tiresome; does it therefore necessarily follow that the goodness and sensibility of their hearts are blunted, and that there may not be, amid the great variety of women, hearts and minds worthy of comprehending them, and of making it their duty to extend a larger amount of forbearance and indulgence in return for the glory and happiness of being the companions of these noble beings? It is remarked, in support of the above theory, that almost all men of genius who have married—Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, Dryden, Byron, and many others—were unhappy. But have these observers examined well on which side lay the cause of unhappiness? Who will say that if Dante, instead of Gemma Donati, "the ferocious wife" (a thought expressed by Lord Byron in his 'Prophecy,' evidently to appropriate it to himself, speaking of "*the cold companion who brought him ruin for her dowry*"); who will say that if Dante, instead of Gemma Donati, had married his Beatrice Portinari, she would not have been the companion and soother of his exile? that the bread of the foreigner shared with her would not have seemed *less bitter?* and that he would not have found it *less fatiguing to mount, leaning on her, the staircase leading to another's dwelling?*—

"Lo scendere e il salio per l'altrin scale."—DANTE.

And can we doubt that Milton's misfortune was caused by his unhappy choice of a wife, since almost directly after her arrival at their conjugal home she became alarmed at her husband's literary habits and also at the solitude and poverty reigning in the house, and finally abandoned him after a month's trial? To speak only of England, was it not from similar causes, or nearly so, that the amiable Shakespeare's misfortune arose? also that of Dryden, Addison, Steele? And, indeed, the same may be said of all the great men belonging to whatsoever age or country.

If we were to enter into a polemic on this subject, or simply to make conscientious researches, there would be many chances of proving, in opposition to the axiom, that the fault of these great men lay in the bad choice of their helpmates. In truth, if there have been a Gemma Donati and a Milbank, we also find in ancient times a Calpurnia and a Portia among the wives of great men; and, in modern times, wives of poets, who have been the honour of their sex, proud of their husbands, and living only for them. Ought not these examples at least to destroy the absolute nature of the theory, making it at best conditional? The larger number of great men, it is true, did not marry; of this number we find, Michael Angelo, Raphael, Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, Cervantes, Voltaire, Pope, Alfieri, and Canova; and many others among the poets and philosophers, Bacon, Newton, Galileo, Descartes, Bayle, and Leibnitz.

What does that prove, if not that they either would not or could not marry, but certainly not that they were incapable of being good husbands? Be-

sides, a thousand causes—apart from the fear of being unhappy in domestic life, considerations of fortune, prior attachments, &c.—may have prevented them. But as to Lord Byron, at least, it is still more certain with regard to him than to any other, that he might have been happy had he made a better choice: if circumstances had only been tolerable, as he himself says. Lord Byron had none of those faults that often disturb harmony, because they put the wife's virtue to too great a trial. If the best disposition, according to a deep moralist, is that which gives much and exacts nothing, then assuredly his deserves to be so characterised. Lord Byron exacted nothing for himself. Moreover, discussion, contradiction, teasing, were insupportable to him; his amiable jesting way even precluded them. In all the circumstances and all the details of his life he displayed that high generosity, that contempt of petty, selfish, material calculations so well adapted for gaining hearts in general, and especially those of women. Add to that the *prestige* belonging to his great beauty, his wit, his grace, and it will be easy to understand the love he must have inspired as soon as he became known.

"Pope remarks," says Moore, "that extraordinary geniuses have the misfortune to be admired rather than loved; but I can say, from my own personal experience, that Lord Byron was an exception to this rule." *

Nevertheless, Lord Byron, though exceptional in so many things, yet belonged to the first order of geniuses. Therefore he could not escape some of the

* Moore, p. 389.

laws belonging to these first-rate natures: certain habits, tendencies, sentiments—I may almost say infirmities—of genius deriving their *origin from the same sympathies, the same wants.*

He required to have certain things granted to him: his hours for solitude, the silence of his library, which he sometimes preferred to everything, even to the society of the woman he loved. It was wrong to wish by force to shut him up to read the Bible, or to make him come to tea and regulate all his hours as a good priest might do. When he was plunged in the delights of Plato's 'Banquet,' or conversing with his own ideas, it was folly to interrupt him. But this state was exceptional with him. "*One does not have fever habitually*," said he of himself, characterising this state of excitement that belongs to composition; and as soon as he returned to his usual state, and that his mind, disengaged from itself, came down from the heights to which it had soared, what amiability then, what a charm in all he said and did! Was not one hour passed with him then a payment with rich usury for all the little concessions his genius required? And lastly, if we descend well into the depths of his soul, by all he said and did, by all his sadness, joy, tenderness, we may be well convinced that none more than he was susceptible of domestic happiness.

"If I could have been the husband of the Countess G——," said he to Mrs. B——, a few days only before setting out for Greece, "we should have been cited, I am certain, as samples of conjugal happiness, and our retired domestic life would have made us respectable! But alas! I cannot marry her."

It is also by his latest affections that he proved how, if he had been united to a woman after his own heart, he might have enjoyed and given all the domestic happiness that God vouchsafes us here below, and that when love should have undergone the transformations produced by time and custom, he would have known how to replace the poetic enchantments of love's first days, by feelings graver, more unchanging too, and no less tender and sacred.

But we must interrogate those who knew and saw him personally, and in the first place Moore; for not only was Moore acquainted with Lord Byron's secret soul, but to him had the poet confided the treasure of his memoirs, whose principal object was to throw light on the most fatal event of his life, and whose sacrifice, made in deference to the susceptibilities of a few living nullities, will be an eternal remorse for England. Now this is how Moore expresses himself on this subject:—

"With respect to the causes that may be supposed to have led to this separation, it seems needless, with the characters of both parties before our eyes, to go in quest of any very remote or mysterious reasons to account for it."

After observing that men of great genius have never seemed made for domestic happiness, through certain habits, certain wants of their nature, and certain faults, which appear, he says, like the shade thrown by genius in proportion to its greatness, Moore adds that Lord Byron still was, in many respects, *a singular exception to this rule*, for his heart was so sensitive and his passions so ardent, that the world of reality never ceased to hold a large place in

his sympathies; that for the rest, his imagination could never usurp the place of reality, neither in his feelings nor in the objects exciting them.

"The poet in Lord Byron," says Moore, "never absorbed the man. From this very mixture has it arisen that his pages bear so deeply the stamp of real life, and that in the works of no poet, with the exception of Shakspeare, can every various mood of the mind—whether solemn or gay, whether inclined to the ludicrous or the sublime, whether seeking to divert itself with the follies of society or panting after the grandeur of solitary nature—find so readily a strain of sentiment in accordance with its every passing tone."

Nevertheless he did not completely escape the usual fate of great geniuses, since he also experienced, though rarely, and always with good cause, that sadness which, as Shakspeare says,—

"Sicklies the face of happiness itself."

"To these faults, and sources of faults, inherent in his own sensitive nature, he added also many of those which a long indulgence of self-will generates—the least compatible, of all others, with that system of mutual concession and sacrifice by which the balance of domestic peace is maintained. In him they were softened down by good-nature. When we look back, indeed, to the unbridled career, of which this marriage was meant to be the goal—to the rapid and restless course in which his life had run along, like a burning train, through a series of wanderings, adventures, successes, and passions, the fever of all which was still upon him, when, with the same headlong

recklessness, he rushed into this marriage, it can but little surprise us that, in the space of one short year, he should not have been able to recover all at once from his bewilderment, or to settle down into that *tame level* of conduct which the close observers of his every action required. As well might it be expected that a steed like his own Mazeppa's—

> 'Wild as the wild deer, and untaught,
> With spur and bridle undefiled,'

should stand still, when reined, without chafing or champing the bit.*

"Even had the new condition of life into which he passed been one of prosperity and smoothness, some time, as well as tolerance, must still have been allowed for the subsiding of so excited a spirit into rest. But, on the contrary, his marriage was at once a signal for all the arrears and claims of a long-accumulating state of embarrassment to explode upon him; his door was almost daily beset by duns, and his house nine times during that year in possession of bailiffs; while, in addition to these anxieties, he had also the pain of fancying that the eyes of enemies and spies were upon him, even under his own roof, and that his every hasty word and look were interpreted in the most perverted light.

"He saw but little society, his only relief from the thoughts which a life of such embarrassment brought with it was in those avocations which his duty, as a member of the Drury Lane Committee, imposed upon him. And here, in this most unlucky connection with the theatre, one of the fatalities of his short year of trial, as husband, lay. From the reputation

* Moore's Life, vol. iii., p. 209.

which he had previously acquired for gallantries, and the sort of reckless and boyish levity to which—often in very bitterness of soul—he gave way, it was not difficult to bring suspicion upon some of those acquaintances which his frequent intercourse with the green-room induced him to form, or even (as in one instance was the case) to connect with his name injuriously that of a person to whom he had scarcely ever addressed a single word.

"Notwithstanding, however, this ill-starred concurrence of circumstances, which might have palliated any excesses either of temper or conduct into which they drove him, it was, after all, I am persuaded, to no such serious causes that the unfortunate alienation, which so soon ended in disunion, is to be traced.

"'In all the unhappy marriages I have ever seen,' says Steele, 'the great cause of evil has proceeded from slight occasions,' and to this remark, I think, the marriage under our consideration would not be found, upon enquiry, to be an exception. Lord Byron himself, indeed, when at Cephalonia, a short time before his death, seems to have expressed, in a few words, the whole pith of the mystery.

"An English gentleman, with whom he was conversing on the subject of Lady Byron, having ventured to enumerate to him the various causes he had heard alleged for the separation, the noble poet, who had seemed much amused with their absurdity and falsehood, said, after listening to them all: 'The causes, my dear sir, were too simple to be easily found out.'

"In truth, the circumstances, so unexampled, that attended their separation, the last words of the wife to the husband being those of the most playful affec-

tion, while the language of the husband towards the wife was in a strain, as the world knows, of tenderest eulogy, are in themselves a sufficient proof that, at the time of their parting, there could have been no very deep sense of injury on either side. It was not till afterwards that, in both bosoms, the repulsive force came into operation, when, to the party which had taken the first decisive step in the strife, it became naturally a point of pride to persevere in it with dignity, and this unbendingness provoked, as naturally, in the haughty spirit of the other, a strong feeling of resentment which overflowed, at last, in acrimony and scorn. If there be any truth, however, in the principle, that they never pardon who have done the wrong, Lord Byron, who was, to the last, disposed to reconciliation, proved, at least, that his conscience was not troubled by any very guilty recollections.

"But though it would have been difficult, perhaps, for the victims of this strife themselves to have pointed out the real cause for their disunion, beyond that general incompatibility which is the canker *of all such marriages*, the public, which seldom allows itself to be at fault on these occasions, was, as usual, ready with an ample supply of reasons for the breach, all tending to blacken the already darkly painted character of the poet, and representing him, in short, as a finished monster of cruelty and depravity. The reputation of the object of his choice for every possible virtue, was now turned against him by his assailants, as if the excellences of the wife were proof positive of every enormity they chose to charge upon the husband. Meanwhile, the unmoved silence

of Lady Byron under the repeated demands made for a specification of her charges against him, left to malice and imagination the fullest range for their combined industry. It was accordingly stated, and almost universally believed, that the noble Lord's second proposal to Miss Milbank had been but with a view to revenge himself for the slight inflicted by her refusal of the first, and that he himself had confessed so much to her on their way from the church. At the time when, as the reader has seen from his own honey-moon letters, he in all faith fancied himself happy, and even boasted, in the pride of his imagination, that if marriage were to be upon lease, he would gladly renew his own for a term of ninety-nine years!

"At this very time, according to these veracious chronicles, he was employed in darkly following up the aforesaid scheme of revenge, and tormenting his lady by all sorts of unmanly cruelties—such as firing off pistols, to frighten her as she lay in bed, and other such freaks.* To the falsehoods concerning his

* It is true that once Lord Byron discharged a pistol, by accident, in Lady Byron's room, when she was *enceinte*. This action, coupled with the preoccupations and sadness overwhelming Lord Byron's mind at this time, and further aided by the insinuation of Mrs. Charlemont, made Lady Byron begin and continue to suspect that he was mad, and so fully did she believe it, that from that hour, she could never see him come near her without trembling. It was under the influence of this absurd idea that she left him. Lady Byron was not guilty of the reports then current against him. They were spread abroad by her parents; she, on the contrary, as long as she thought him mad, felt great sorrow at it. It was only when she had to persuade herself that he was not mad, that she vowed hatred against him, convinced as she was that he had only married her out of revenge, and not from love. But if an imaginary fear, and even an unreasonable jealousy may be her excuse (just as one excuses a monomania), can one equally forgive her silence? Such a silence is morally what are physically the poisons which kill at once, and defy all remedies, thus insuring the culprit's safety. This silence it is which will ever be her crime, for by it she poisoned the life of her husband.

green-room intimacies, and particularly with respect to one beautiful actress, with whom, in reality, he had hardly ever exchanged a single word, I have already adverted; and the extreme confidence with which this tale was circulated and believed affords no unfair specimen of the sort of evidence with which the public, in all such fits of moral wrath, is satisfied. It is, at the same time, very far from my intention to allege that, in the course of the noble poet's intercourse with the theatre, he was not sometimes led into a line of acquaintance and converse, unbefitting, if not dangerous to, the steadiness of married life. But the imputations against him on this head were not the less unfounded, as the sole case in which he afforded anything like real grounds for such an accusation did not take place till after the period of the separation.

"Not content with such ordinary and tangible charges, the tongue of rumour was emboldened to proceed still further; and, presuming upon the mysterious silence maintained by one of the parties, ventured to throw out dark hints and vague insinuations, of which the fancy of every hearer was left to fill up the outline as he pleased. In consequence of all this exaggeration, such an outcry was now raised against Lord Byron as, in no case of private life, perhaps, was ever before witnessed; nor had the whole amount of fame which he had gathered, in the course of the last four years, much exceeded in proportion the reproach and obloquy that were now, within the space of a few weeks, heaped upon him. In addition to the many who, no doubt, conscientiously believed and reprobated what they had but too much right, whether viewing him as poet or

man of fashion, to consider credible excesses, there were also actively on the alert that large class of persons who seem to think that inveighing against the vices of others is equivalent to virtue in themselves, together with all those natural haters of success who, having long been disgusted with the splendour of the poet, were now enabled, in the guise of champions for innocence, to wreak their spite on the man. In every various form of paragraph, pamphlet, and caricature, both his character and person were held up to odium. Hardly a voice was raised, or at least listened to, in his behalf; and though a few faithful friends remained unshaken by his side, the utter hopelessness of stemming the torrent was felt as well by them as by himself, and, after an effort or two to gain a fair hearing, they submitted in silence."

As to Lord Byron, he hardly attempted to defend himself. Among all these slanders, he only wished to repel one that wounded his generous pride beyond endurance; and so he wrote to Rogers:—

"You are of the few persons with whom I have lived in what is called intimacy, and have heard me at times conversing on the untoward topic of my recent family disquietudes. Will you have the goodness to say to me at once, whether you ever heard me speak of her with disrespect, with unkindness, or defending myself at her expense by any serious imputation of any description against her? Did you never hear me say, 'that when there was a right or a wrong, she had the right'? The reason I put these questions to you or others of my friends is, because I am said, by her and hers, to have resorted to such means of exculpation."

It makes one's heart bleed to see this noble intellect forced by the stupid cruel persecution of wicked fools to descend into the arena and justify himself. But he soon ceased all kind of defence. A struggle of this sort was most repugnant to him. At first Lord Byron had counted on his wife's return, which would, indeed, have proved his best justification. When he saw this return deferred, he asked simply for an inquiry, but could not obtain what he solicited. His accusers, unable to state anything definite against him, naturally preferred calumny and *magnanimous* silence to inquiry! At last, when he felt that reunion had become improbable, and that his friends, for want of moral courage and independence, confined themselves to mere condolence, he sought for strength in the testimony of conscience and in his determination of one day making the whole truth known. And he did so in effect, a year later, while he was in Italy, and when all hope of reunion was over. Then it was that he wrote his memoirs.

Here perhaps I ought to speak of one of England's greatest crimes, or rather, of the crime committed by a few Englishmen: I mean *the destruction of his Memoirs,* a deed perpetrated for the sake of screening the self-love and the follies, if not the crimes, of a whole host of insignificant beings. But, having already spoken of that in another chapter, I will content myself with repeating here that these memoirs were all the more precious, as their principal object was to make known the truth; that the impression they left on the mind was a perfect conviction of the writer's sincerity; that Lord Byron possessed the most generous of souls, and that the separation

had no other cause but incompatibility of disposition between the two parties. Had he not given irrefragable proof of the truth of these memoirs, by sending them to be read and *commented on* by Lady Byron? We know with what cruel disdain she met this generous proceeding. As to their morality, I will content myself with quoting the exact expressions used by Lady B——, wife of the then Ambassador in Italy, to whom Moore gave them to read, and who had copied them out entirely:—

"*I read these memoirs at Florence,*" said she to Countess G——, "*and I assure you that I might have given them to my daughter of fifteen to read, so perfectly free are they from any stain of immorality.*"

Let us then repeat once more, that they, as well as the last cantos of 'Don Juan,' and the journal he kept in Greece, were sacrificed for the sole purpose of destroying all memento of the guilty weakness of persons calling themselves his friends, and also of hiding the opinions, not always very flattering, entertained by Lord Byron about a number of living persons, who had unfortunately survived him. It is difficult to conceive in any case, how these memoirs written at Venice, when his heart was torn with grief and bitterness, could possibly have been silent as to the injustice and calumny overwhelming him, or even as to the pusillanimous behaviour of so-called friends; while even writers generally hostile no longer took part against him.

For example, this is how Macaulay speaks of him, —Macaulay who was not over lenient towards Lord Byron, whom he never personally knew, and who is seldom just as well from party spirit as from his

desire of shining in antithesis and high-sounding phrases :—

"At twenty-four he found himself on the highest pinnacle of literary fame, along with Walter Scott, Wordsworth, Southey, and a crowd of other distinguished writers. There is scarcely an instance in history of so sudden a rise to so dizzy an eminence. Everything that could stimulate, and everything that could gratify the strongest propensities of our nature, the gaze of a hundred drawing-rooms, the acclamation of the whole nation, the applause of applauded men, the love of lovely women,—all this world, and all the glory of it, were at once offered to a youth to whom nature had given violent passions, and whom education had never taught to control them. He lived as many men live who have no similar excuse to plead for their faults. But his countrymen and countrywomen would love and admire him. They were resolved to see in his excesses only the flash and outbreak of that same fiery mind which glowed in his poetry. He attacked religion; yet in religious circles his name was mentioned with fondness, and in many religious publications his works were censured with singular tenderness. He lampooned the Prince Regent; yet he could not alienate the Tories. Every thing, it seemed, was to be forgiven to youth, rank, and genius.*

"Then came the reaction. Society, capricious in its indignation as it had been capricious in its fondness, flew into a rage with its froward and petted darling.

* All this is either *false* or *exaggerated.* Religious criticisms were not so mild, though he had not in any way *attacked religion*, and the Tories *never forgave* his attack on the Prince Regent, which they made a great noise about.

He had been worshipped with an irrational idolatry. He was persecuted with an irrational fury. Much has been written about those unhappy domestic occurrences which decided the fate of his life. Yet nothing is, nothing ever was, positively known to the public but this,—that he quarrelled with his lady, and that she refused to live with him. There have been hints in abundance, and shrugs and shakings of the head, and '*Well, well, we know*,' and '*We could if we would*,' and '*If we list to speak*,' and '*There be that might an they list*.' But we are not aware that there is before the world, substantiated by credible, or even by tangible evidence, a single fact indicating that Lord Byron was *more to blame than any other man who is on bad terms with his wife*."

And after having said how the persons consulted by Lady Byron, and who had advised her to separate from her husband, formed their opinion without hearing both parties, and that it would be quite unjust and irrational to pronounce, or even to form, an opinion on an affair so imperfectly known, Mr. Macaulay continues in these words :—

" We know no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality. In general, elopements, divorces, and family quarrels, pass with little notice. We read the scandal, talk about it for a day, and forget it. But once in six or seven years our virtue becomes outrageous. We cannot suffer the laws of religion and decency to be violated. We must make a stand against vice. We must teach libertines that the English people appreciate the importance of domestic ties. Accordingly some unfortunate man, in no respect more depraved

than hundreds whose offences have been treated with lenity, is singled out as an expiatory sacrifice. If he has children, they are to be taken from him. If he has a profession, he is to be driven from it. He is cut by the higher orders, and hissed by the lower. He is, in truth, a sort of whipping-boy, by whose vicarious agonies all the other transgressors of the same class are, it is supposed, sufficiently chastised. We reflect very complacently on our own severity, and compare with great pride the high standard of morals established in England with the Parisian laxity. At length our anger is satiated. Our victim is ruined and heart-broken, and our virtue goes quietly to sleep for seven years more. It is clear that those vices which destroy domestic happiness ought to be as much as possible repressed. It is equally clear that they cannot be repressed by penal legislation. It is therefore right and desirable that public opinion should be directed against them. But it should be directed against them uniformly, steadily, and temperately; not by sudden fits and starts. There should be one weight and one measure. Decimation is always an objectionable mode of punishment. It is the resource of judges too indolent and hasty to investigate facts and to discriminate nicely between shades of guilt. It is an irrational practice, even when adopted by military tribunals. When adopted by the tribunal of public opinion, it is infinitely more irrational. It is good that a certain portion of disgrace should constantly attend on certain bad actions. But it is not good that the offenders should merely have to stand the risks of a lottery of infamy, that ninety-nine out of every hundred should escape, and

that the hundredth, perhaps the most innocent of the hundred, should pay for all. We remember to have seen a mob assembled in Lincoln's Inn to hoot a gentleman against whom the most oppressive proceeding known to the English law was then in progress. He was hooted because he had been an unfaithful husband, as if some of the most popular men of the age, Lord Nelson for example, had not been unfaithful husbands. We remember a still stronger case. Will posterity believe that, in an age in which men whose gallantries were universally known, and had been legally proved, filled some of the highest offices in the state and in the army, presided at the meetings of religious and benevolent institutions, were the delight of every society, and the favourites of the multitude, a crowd of moralists went to the theatre, in order to pelt a poor actor for disturbing the conjugal felicity of an alderman? What there was in the circumstances either of the offender or of the sufferer to vindicate the zeal of the audience we could never conceive. It has never been supposed that the situation of an actor is peculiarly favourable to the rigid virtues, or that an alderman enjoys any special immunity from injuries such as that which on this occasion roused the anger of the public. But such is the justice of mankind. In these cases the punishment was excessive; but the offence was known and proved. The case of Lord Byron was harder. True Jedwood justice was dealt out to him. First came the execution, then the investigation, and last of all, or rather not at all, the accusation. The public, without knowing any-

thing whatever about the transactions in his family, flew into a violent passion with him, and proceeded to invent stories which might justify its anger. Ten or twenty different accounts of the separation, inconsistent with each other, with themselves, and with common sense, circulated at the same time. What evidence there might be for any one of these the virtuous people who repeated them neither know nor cared. For in fact these stories were not the causes, but the effects of the public indignation. They resembled those loathsome slanders which Lewis Goldsmith, and other abject libellers of the same class, were in the habit of publishing about Bonaparte; such as that he poisoned a girl with arsenic when he was at the military school, that he hired a grenadier to shoot Desaix at Marengo, that he filled St. Cloud with all the pollutions of Capreæ. There was a time when anecdotes like these obtained some credence from persons who, hating the French Emperor without knowing why, were eager to believe anything which might justify their hatred.

"Lord Byron fared in the same way. His countrymen were in a bad humour with him. His writings and his character had lost the charm of novelty. He had been guilty of the offence which, of all offences, is punished most severely; he had been overpraised; he had excited too warm an interest; and the public, with its usual justice, chastised him for its own folly. The attachments of the multitude bear no small resemblance to those of the wanton enchantress in the Arabian Tales, who, when the forty days of her fondness were over, was not content with dismissing

her lovers, but condemned them to expiate, in loathsome shapes, and under cruel penances, the crime of having once pleased her too well.

"The obloquy which Byron had to endure was such as might well have shaken a more constant mind. The newspapers were filled with lampoons. The theatres shook with execrations. He was excluded from circles where he had lately been the *observed* of all *observers*. All those creeping things that riot in the decay of nobler natures hastened to their repast; and they were right; they did after their kind. It is not every day that the savage envy of aspiring dunces is gratified by the agonies of such a spirit, and the degradation of such a name. The unhappy man left his country for ever. The howl of contumely followed him across the sea, up the Rhine, over the Alps; it gradually waxed fainter; it died away; those who had raised it began to ask each other, what, after all, was the matter about which they had been so clamorous, and wished to invite back the criminal whom they had just chased from them. His poetry became more popular than it had ever been; and his complaints were read with tears by thousands and tens of thousands who had never seen his face."

These observations of Macaulay are applied by Mr. Disraeli to Lord Cadurcis, who, in his novel called 'Venetia,' is no other than Lord Byron:—

"Lord Cadurcis," says he, "was the periodical victim, the scapegoat of English morality, sent into the wilderness with all the crimes and curses of the multitude on his head. Lord Cadurcis had certainly committed a great crime, not his intrigue with Lady

Monteagle, for that surely was not an unprecedented offence; nor his duel with her husband, for after all it was a duel in self-defence: and, at all events, divorces and duels, under any circumstances, would scarcely have excited or authorised the storm which was now about to burst over the late spoiled child of society. But Lord Cadurcis had been guilty of the offence which, of all offences, is punished most severely. Lord Cadurcis had been overpraised. He had excited too warm an interest; and the public, with its usual justice, was resolved to chastise him for its own folly. There are no fits of caprice so hasty and so violent as those of society. Cadurcis, in allusion to his sudden and singular success, had been in the habit of saying to his intimates that he 'woke one morning and found himself famous.' He might now observe, 'I woke one morning and found myself infamous.' Before twenty-four hours had passed over his duel with Lord Monteagle, he found himself branded by every journal in London as an unprincipled and unparalleled reprobate. The public, without waiting to think, or even to inquire after the truth, instantly selected as genuine the most false and the most flagrant of the fifty libellous narratives that were circulated of the transaction. Stories, inconsistent with themselves, were all alike eagerly believed, and what evidence there might be for any one of them, the virtuous people, by whom they were repeated, neither knew nor cared. The public, in short, fell into a passion with their darling, and, ashamed of their past idolatry, nothing would satisfy them but knocking the divinity on the head."

And this same Mr. Disraeli, whose testimony is all

the more precious as coming from a Tory celebrity, after having described the shameful reception given by the noble House to Lord Cadurcis, when he presented himself there after the duel, and the atrocious conduct of the stupid populace clamouring against him outside, goes on in these terms :—

"And indeed to witness this young, and noble, and gifted creature, but a few days back the idol of the nation, and from whom a word, a glance even, was deemed the greatest and most gratifying distinction—whom all orders, classes, and conditions of men had combined to stimulate with multiplied adulation, with all the glory and ravishing delights of the world, as it were, forced upon him—to see him thus assailed with the savage execrations of all those vile things who exult in the fall of everything that is great and the abasement of everything that is noble, was indeed a spectacle which might have silenced malice and satisfied envy!"

To these just appreciations formed by some of Lord Byron's biographers we might add many more; but the limits we have assigned to this work not admitting of it, we will only add, as a last testimony, the most severe of all; him of whom Moore said, "that, if one wished to speak against Lord Byron, one had only to apply to him," that is, to Lord Byron himself.

In 1820, when Lord Byron was at Ravenna, an article from 'Blackwood's Magazine,' entitled 'Observations on Don Juan,' was sent him.

It contained such unfounded strictures on his matrimonial conduct, that, for once, Lord Byron infringed his rule and could not help answering it. The

extracts from his defence, "*if defence it can be called*," says Moore, "*where there has never yet been any definite charge, will be read with the liveliest interest.*" Here, then, is a part of these extracts :—

"It is in vain, says my learned brother, that Lord Byron attempts in any way to justify his own behaviour with regard to Lady Byron.

"And now that he has so openly and audaciously invited inquiry and reproach, we do not see any good reason why he should not be plainly told so by the voice of his countrymen."

"How far the openness of an anonymous poem, and the audacity of an imaginary character, which the writer supposes to be meant for Lady Byron, may be deemed to merit this formidable denunciation from their most sweet voices, I neither know nor care; but when he tells me that I cannot 'in any way justify my own behaviour in that affair,' I acquiesce, because no man can justify himself until he knows of what he is accused; and I have never had—and, God knows, my whole desire has ever been to obtain it—any specific charge, in a tangible shape, submitted to me by the adversary, nor by others, unless the atrocities of public rumour and the mysterious silence of the lady's legal advisers may be deemed such.

"But is not the writer content with what has been already said and done? Has not the general voice of his countrymen long ago pronounced upon the subject sentence without trial, and condemnation without a charge? Have I not been exiled by ostracism, except that the shells which proscribed me were anonymous? Is the writer ignorant of the public

opinion and the public conduct upon that occasion? If he is, I am not: the public will forget both long before I shall cease to remember either.

"The man who is exiled by a faction has the consolation of thinking that he is a martyr; he is upheld by hope and the dignity of his cause, real or imaginary: he who withdraws from the pressure of debt may indulge in the thought that time and prudence will retrieve his circumstances; he who is condemned by the law has a term to his banishment, or a dream of its abbreviation; or, it may be, the knowledge or the belief of some injustice of the law, or of its administration, in his own particular. But he who is outlawed by general opinion, without the intervention of hostile politics, illegal judgment, or embarrassed circumstances, whether he be innocent or guilty, must undergo all the bitterness of exile, without hope, without pride, without alleviation. This case was mine. Upon what grounds the public founded their opinion I am not aware; but it was general, and it was decisive. Of me or of mine they knew little, except that I had written what is called poetry, was a nobleman, had married, became a father, and was involved in differences with my wife and her relatives, no one knew why, because the persons complaining refused to state their grievances. The fashionable world was divided into parties, mine consisting of a very small minority; the reasonable world was naturally on the stronger side, which happened to be the lady's, as was most proper and polite. The press was active and scurrilous; and such was the rage of the day that the unfortunate publication of two copies of verses rather complimentary

than otherwise to the subjects of both, was tortured into a species of crime, or constructive petty treason. I was accused of every monstrous vice by public rumour and private rancour; my name, which had been a knightly or a noble one since my fathers helped to conquer the kingdom for William the Norman, was tainted. I felt that, if what was whispered, and muttered, and murmured, was true, I was unfit for England; if false, England was unfit for me. I withdrew: but this was not enough. In other countries, in Switzerland, in the shadow of the Alps, and by the blue depth of the lakes, I was pursued and breathed upon by the blight. I crossed the mountains, but it was the same; so I went a little farther, and settled myself by the waves of the Adriatic, like the stag at bay, who betakes him to the waters.

"If I may judge by the statements of the few friends who gathered round me, the outcry of the period to which I allude was beyond all precedent, all parallel, even in those cases where political motives have sharpened slander and doubled enmity."

One regrets not being able to go on reproducing these fine pages written by Lord Byron; but the limits we have assigned ourselves force the sacrifice.

And now, after all that has been placed before the reader, will he not be curious to learn whether Lord Byron truly loved Lady Byron. The answer admits of no doubt. Could love exist between two natures so widely dissonant? But then it will be said, why did he marry her? This question may be answered by the simple observation that two-thirds of the mar-

riages in high life, and indeed in all classes, are contracted without any love, nor are the parties, therefore, condemned to unhappiness. Still it is as well to recall that not only it did not enter into Lord Byron's views to marry for love and to satisfy passion, but that he married rather for the sake of escaping from the yoke of his passions! "If I were in love I should be jealous," said he, "and then I could not render happy the woman I married." "Let her be happy," added he, "and then, for my part, I shall also be so." Then again we find, "Let them only leave me my mornings free." Lastly, he wrote in his journal, before marrying Miss Milbank, and while in correspondence with her: "It is very singular, but there is not a spark of love between me and Miss Milbank." If, then, Miss Milbank married Lord Byron out of self-love, and to prevent his marrying a young and beautiful Irish girl, Lord Byron, on his part, married Miss Milbank from motives the most honourable to human nature. It was her *simple modest* air that attracted him and caused his delusion, and the fame of her virtues quite decided him. As to interested motives, they were at most but secondary; and his disinterestedness was all the more meritorious, since the embarrassed state of his affairs made him really require money, and Miss Milbank had none at that period. She was an only daughter, it is true; but her parents were still in the prime of life, and her uncle, Lord Wentworth, from whom her mother was to inherit before herself, might yet live many years. His marriage with Miss Milbank was thus not only disinterested as regards fortune, but even *imprudently generous*; for she only brought him a small dowry of 10,000*l.*—a mere trifle

compared to the life of luxury she was to lead, in accordance with their mutual rank.* And these 10,000*l.* were not only returned by Lord Byron on their separation, but generously doubled.

And now let us hasten to add that although Lord Byron was not in love with Miss Milbank, he had no dislike to her person; for she was rather pretty and pleasing in appearance. Her reputation for moral and intellectual qualities, standing on such a high pedestal, Lord Byron naturally conceived that esteem might well suffice to replace tenderness. It is certain that, if she had lent herself to it more, and if circumstances had only been endurable, their union might have presented the same character common to most aristocratic couples in England, and that even Lord Byron might have been able to act from virtue in default of feeling; but that little requisite for him was wholly wanting.

His celebrated and touching 'Farewell' might be brought up as an objection to what we have just advanced. It might be said that the word *sincere* is a proof of love, and *insincere* a proof of *falsehood*. Lastly, that in all cases there was a want of delicacy and refinement in thus confiding his domestic troubles to the public. Well, all that would be ill-founded, unjust, and contrary to truth. This is the truth of the matter. Lord Byron had just been informed that Lady Byron, having sent off by post the letter wherein she confirmed all that her father, Sir Ralph, had written, namely, her resolution of not returning to the conjugal roof, had afterwards caused this letter to

* See the description of her life made by him to Medwin during his stay at Pisa.

be sought for, and on its being restored, had given way to almost mad demonstrations of joy. Could he see aught else in this account save a certainty of the evil influences weighing on her, and making her act in contradiction to her real sentiments? He pitied her then as a victim, thought of all the virtues *said* to crown her, the illusive belief in which he was far then from having lost; he forgot the wrongs she had inflicted on him—the spying she had kept up around him—the calumnies spread against him—the use she had made of the letters subtracted from his desk. Yes, all was forgotten by his generous heart; and, according to custom, he even went so far as to accuse himself—to see in the victim only his wife, the mother of his little Ada! Under this excitement he was walking about at night in his solitary apartments, and suddenly chanced to perceive in some corner different things that had belonged to Lady Byron—dresses and other articles of attire. It is well known how much the sight of these inanimate mementoes has power to call up recollections even to ordinary imaginations. What, then, must have been the vividness with which they acted on an imagination like Lord Byron's? His heart softened towards her, and he recollected that one day, under the influence of sorrows which well nigh robbed him of consciousness, he had answered her harshly. Thinking himself in the wrong, and full of the anguish that all these reflections and objects excited in his breast, he allowed his tears to flow, and, snatching a pen, wrote down that touching effusion, which somewhat eased his suffering.

The next day one of his friends found these beautiful

verses on his desk; and, judging of Lady Byron's heart and that of the public according to his own, he imprudently gave them to the world. Thus we can no more doubt Lord Byron's sincerity in writing them than we can accuse him of publishing them. But what may cause astonishment is that they could possibly have been ill-interpreted, as they were; and, above all, that this touching 'Farewell'—which made Madame de Staël say she would gladly have been unhappy, like Lady Byron, to draw it forth—that it should not have had power to rescue her heart from its apathy, and bring her to the feet of her husband, or at least into his arms. Let us add, in conclusion, that the most atrocious part of this affair, and doubtless the most wounding for him, was precisely Lady Byron's conduct; and in this conduct the worst was *her cruel silence!*

She has been called, after his words, the moral Clytemnestra* of her husband. Such a surname is severe; but the repugnance we feel to condemning a woman cannot prevent our listening to the voice of justice, which tells us that the comparison is still in favour of the guilty one of antiquity. For she, driven to crime by fierce passion overpowering reason, at least only deprived her husband of physical life, and in committing the deed exposed herself to all its consequences; while Lady Byron left her husband at the very moment that she saw him struggling amid a thousand shoals, in the stormy sea of embarrassments created by his marriage, and precisely when he more than ever required a friendly, tender, and indulgent

* Lord Byron, in lines wrung from him by anguish and anger, says *the moral Clytemnestra of thy Lord.*

hand to save him from the tempests of life. Besides, she shut herself up in silence a thousand times more cruel than Clytemnestra's poniard, that only killed the body; whereas Lady Byron's silence was destined to kill the soul, and such a soul! leaving the door open to calumny, and making it to be supposed that her silence was magnanimity destined to cover over frightful wrongs, perhaps even depravity. In vain did he, feeling his conscience at ease, implore some inquiry and examination. She refused, and the only favour she granted was to send him, one fine day, two persons, to see whether he were not mad. Happily, Lord Byron only discovered at a later period the purport of this strange visit.

In vain did Lord Byron's friend, the companion of all his travels, throw himself at Lady Byron's feet, imploring her to give over this fatal silence. The only reply she deigned was, that she had thought him mad!

And why, then, had she believed him mad? Because she, a methodical inflexible woman, with that unbendingness which a profound moralist calls the worship rendered to pride by a feelingless soul;—because she could not understand the possibility of tastes and habits different to those of ordinary routine, or of her own starched life! Not to be hungry when she was—not to sleep at night, but to write while she was sleeping, and to sleep when she was up—in short, to gratify the requirements of material and intellectual life at hours different to hers:—all that was not merely annoying for her, but it must be *madness!* or if not, it betokened depravity that she could

neither submit to nor tolerate without perilling her own morality!

Such was the grand secret of the cruel silence which exposed Lord Byron to the most malignant interpretations—to all the calumny and revenge of his enemies.

She was perhaps the only woman in the world so strangely organised—the only one, perhaps, capable of not feeling happy and proud at belonging to a man superior to the rest of humanity! and fatally was it decreed that this woman *alone* of her species should be Lord Byron's wife!

Before closing this chapter it remains for us to examine if it be true, as several of his biographers have pretended, that he wished to be re-united to his wife. We must here declare that Lord Byron's intention, in the last years of his life, was, on the contrary, not to see Lady Byron again. This is what he wrote from Ravenna, to Moore, in June, 1820:—

"I have received a Parisian letter from W. W——, which I prefer answering through you, as that worthy says he is an occasional visitor of yours. In November last he wrote to me a well-meaning letter, stating, for some reasons of his own, his belief that a *re-union* might be effected between Lady Byron and myself.

"To this I answered as usual; and he sent me a second letter, repeating his notions, which letter I have never answered, having had a thousand other things to think of. He now writes as if he believed that he had offended me by touching on the topic; and I wish you to assure him that I am not at all so, but, on the contrary, obliged by his good nature. At

the same time *acquaint him the thing is impossible. You know this as well as I, and there let it end.*"

A year later, at Pisa, he again said to M—— "*that he never would have been re-united* to Lady Byron; that the time for such a possibility was passed, and he had made *quite sufficient advances.*"

Let us add likewise that during the last period of his stay at Genoa, a person whose acquaintance he had just made, thought fitting, for several reasons and even by way of winning golden opinions among a certain set in England, to insist on this matter with Lord Byron.

In order to succeed, this person represented Lady Byron as a victim, telling him she was very ill physically and morally, and declaring the secret cause to be, no doubt, grief at her separation from him and dread of his asserting his rights over Ada.

Lord Byron, kind and impressionable as he was, may have been moved at this; but assuredly his resolution of not being re-united to Lady Byron was not shaken. His only reply was to show me a letter he had written some little time before:—

"The letter I enclose," said he, "may help to explain my sentiments. . . . . I was perfectly sincere when I wrote it, and am so still. But it is difficult for me to withstand the thousand provocations on that subject, which both friends and foes have for seven years been throwing in the way of a man whose feelings were once quick, and whose temper was never patient. But 'returning were as tedious as go o'er.' I feel this as much as ever Macbeth did; and it is a dreary sensation, which

at least avenges the real or imaginary wrongs of one of the two unfortunate persons whom it concerns."

Here is the letter he wrote from Pisa to Lady Byron:—

"I have to acknowledge the receipt of Ada's hair, which is very soft and pretty, and nearly as dark already as mine was at twelve years old, if I may judge from what I recollect of some in Augusta's possession, taken at that age. But it don't curl, perhaps from its being let grow.

"I also thank you for the inscription of the date and name, and I will tell you why: I believe that they are the only two or three words of your handwriting in my possession. For your letters I returned, and except the two words, or rather the one word, 'household,' written twice in an old account book, I have no other. I burnt your last note for two reasons:—firstly, it was written in a style not very agreeable; and, secondly, I wished to take your word without documents, which are the worldly resources of suspicious people.

"I suppose that this note will reach you somewhere about Ada's birthday—the 10th of December, I believe. She will then be six, so that in about twelve more I shall have some chance of meeting her; perhaps sooner, if I am obliged to go to England by business or otherwise. Recollect, however, one thing, either in distance or nearness: every day which keeps us asunder should, after so long a period, rather soften our mutual feelings, which must always have one rallying point as long as our child exists, which I

presume we both hope will be long after either of her parents.

"The time which has elapsed since the separation has been considerably more than the whole brief period of our union, and the not much longer one of our prior acquaintance. We both made a bitter mistake; but now it is over, and irrevocably so. For at thirty-three on my part, and a few years less on yours, though it is no very extended period of life, still it is one when the habits and thoughts are generally so formed as to admit of no modification; and as we could not agree when younger, we should with difficulty do so now.

"I say all this, because I own to you that, notwithstanding everything, I considered our re-union as not impossible for more than a year after the separation; but then I gave up the hope entirely and for ever. But this very impossibility of re-union seems to me, at least, a reason why, on all the few points of discussion which can arise between us, we should preserve the courtesies of life, and as much of its kindness as people who are never to meet may preserve, perhaps more easily than nearer connections. For my own part, I am violent, but not malignant; for only fresh provocations can awaken my resentment. To you, who are colder and more concentrated, I would just hint that you may sometimes mistake the depth of a cold anger for dignity, and a worse feeling for duty. I assure you that I bear you now (whatever I may have done) no resentment whatever. Remember that if you have injured me in aught, this forgiveness is something; and that if I have injured you, it is some-

thing more still, if it be true, as moralists say, that the most offending are the least forgiving.

"Whether the offence has been solely on my side or reciprocal, or on yours chiefly, I have ceased to reflect upon any but two things, viz., that you are the mother of my child, and that we shall never meet again. I think if you also consider the two corresponding points with reference to myself, it will be better for all three.

"Yours ever,

"NOEL BYRON."

This letter, though never sent, requires no further proofs. It can now be understood, although the contrary has been said, that Lord Byron's resolution never again to unite with Lady Byron was irrevocable; but that, however, a reconciliation would have pleased him, on account of his daughter, and because no feeling of hatred could find room in his great *soul*.

CHAPTER XIII.

LORD BYRON'S GAIETY AND MELANCHOLY.

His Gaiety.

A GREAT deal has been said about Byron's melancholy. His gaiety has also been spoken of. As usual, all the judgments pronounced have been more or less false. His temperament is just as little known as his disposition, when people affect to judge him in an exclusive way.

Let me, then, be permitted in this instance also to re-establish truth on its only sure basis, namely, facts.

Lord Byron was so often gay that several of his biographers have thought themselves justified in asserting that *gaiety* and not *melancholy* predominated in his nature. Even Mr. Galt, who only knew him at that period of his life when melancholy certainly predominated, nevertheless uses these expressions:—"Singular as it may seem, the poem itself ('Beppo,' his first essay of facetious poetry) has a stronger tone of gaiety than his graver works have of melancholy, commonly believed to have been (I think unjustly) the predominant trait of his character." *

Many others have said the same thing. The truth is, that if by giving way to reflection—which was a necessity of his genius—and through circumstances

* Galt, p. 218.

—which were a fatality of his destiny—he has shown himself melancholy in his writings, and very often in his dispositions, it is no less certain that by temperament and taste, by the activity, penetration, and complex character of his mind, he very often showed himself to be extremely gay. No one better than he seized upon the absurd and ridiculous side of things or more easily found cause for laughter. His gaiety —the result of a frank, open, volatile nature, full of varying moods—was easily excited by any absurdities, ridiculous pretentions, or witty sallies; and then he became so expansive and charming, body and soul with him both seemed to laugh in such unison, that it was impossible not to catch the contagion; but his laughter was ever devoid of malice. Slight defects of harmony in things, or proportion, or mutual relation, easily gave rise to mirthful sensations in him. Being full of admiration for the beautiful, and having, moreover, a great sense of mutual fitness, and much activity of mind, it was with extraordinary and instinctive promptitude that he seized upon the contradictory relations existing between objects, and indeed on all showing a voluntary absence of order and beauty in the conduct of free reasonable beings. His laughter was then quite as æsthetical as it was innocent. And even if it were not admitted, as it is by all philosophical moralists, that no sort of personal calculation enters into this entirely spontaneous emotion, no sentiment of superiority over the being we are laughing at—for *selfishness and laughter never co-exist*—if it were possible, I say, to doubt all this, even then to see Lord Byron laugh would have sufficed to give the right conviction. For truly his

mirth was a charming thing; the very air surrounding him appeared to laugh.

Then would his soul, that often required to emerge from its deep reflections, unbend itself, and alternately disport or repose in utter self-abandonment. It dismissed thought, as it were, in order to become a child again; to deliver itself over to all the caprices of those myriad changeful fugitive impressions that course through the brain at moments of excitement.

Moore often recurs to Byron's liveliness. "Nothing, indeed, could be more amusing and delightful. . . . . It was like the bursting gaiety of a boy let loose from school, and seemed as if there was no extent of fun or tricks of which he was not capable." When Moore visited him at Mira, in the autumn of 1812, and accompanied him to Venice, the former expressed himself as follows in his memorandum of that occasion :—

"As we proceeded across the lagoon in his gondola the sun was just setting, and it was an evening such as Romance would have chosen for a first sight of Venice, rising 'with her tiara of bright towers' above the wave; while to complete, as might be imagined, the solemn interest of the scene, I behold it in company with him who had lately given a new life to its glories, and sung of that fair City of the Sea thus grandly :—

'I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;
A palace and a prison on each hand:
I saw from out the wave her structures rise
As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand:
A thousand years their cloudy wings expand
Around me, and a dying Glory smiles
O'er the far times, when many a subject land
Look'd to the winged Lion's marble piles,
Where Venice sate in state, throned on her hundred isles!'

"But whatever emotions the first sight of such a scene might, under other circumstances, have inspired me with, the mood of mind in which I now viewed it was altogether the reverse of what might have been expected. The exuberant gaiety of my companion, and the recollections—anything but romantic—into which our conversation wandered, put at once completely to flight all poetical and historical associations; and our course was, I am almost ashamed to say, one of uninterrupted merriment and laughter till we found ourselves at the steps of my my friend's palazzo on the Grand Canal. All that ever happened, of gay or ridiculous, during our London life together; his scrapes and my lecturings; our joint adventures with the Bores and Blues, the two great enemies, as he always called them, of London happiness; our joyous nights together at Walter's, Kinnaird's, &c.; and that 'd——d supper of Rancliffe's, which ought to have been a dinner;' all was passed rapidly in review between us, and with a flow of humour and hilarity on his side of which it would have been difficult for persons even far graver than I can pretend to be, not to have caught the contagion."

Lord Byron was especially prone to mirth and fun in the society of those he liked; to jest and laugh with any one was a great proof of his sympathy for them. When he wrote to absent dear ones, he would constantly say, "I have many things to tell you for us to laugh over together." In several letters addressed from Greece to Mme. G———, he informs her of these treasures of mirth, held in reserve for the day of meeting, that they might laugh together. Lord

Byron rarely used flattering language to those he loved. It was rather by looks than by words that he expressed his feelings and his approbation. His delight with intimates was to bring out strongly their defects, as well as their qualities and merits, by dint of jests, clever inuendo, and charming sallies of humour. The promptitude with which he discovered the slightest weakness, the faintest symptom of exaggeration or affectation, can hardly be credited. It might almost be said that the persons on whom he bestowed affection became *transparent* for him, that he dived into their thoughts and feelings.

It was this state of mind especially that gave rise to those sallies of wit which formed such a striking feature of his intelligence. Then his conversation really became quite dazzling. In his glowing language all objects assumed unforeseen and picturesque aspects. New and striking thoughts followed from him in rapid succession, and the flame of his genius lighted up as if winged with wildfire. Those who have not known him at these moments can form no idea of what it was from his works. For, in the silence of his study, when, pen in hand, he was working out his grand conceptions, the lightning strokes lost much of their brilliant intensity; and although we find, especially in 'Don Juan' and 'Beppo,' delightful pages of rich comic humour, only those who knew him can judge how superior still his conversation was. But in this gay exercise of his faculties, which was to him a real enjoyment, in all his sallies or even in his railleries, not one iota of malice could be traced—unless we call by that name

the amusement springing from mirth and wit indulged. Even if his shafts were finely pointed, they were at the same time so inoffensive that the most susceptible could not be wounded.

The great pleasure he took in jesting appears to have belonged to his organization, for it accompanied him throughout life. We have already seen what his nurses, his preceptors, and the friends of his childhood said on this subject. We have observed his sympathy for the old cupbearer of his family mansion; the pleasantries expended on the quack Lavander, who was always promising to cure his foot, and never did; the jesting tone of his boyish correspondence; afterwards the masqueradings that took place at Newstead Abbey; then again his gay doings with Moore and Rogers in London; the jests pervading the correspondence of his maturer years; then their concentration in 'Beppo' and 'Don Juan;' and finally, how often, even in Greece, when he was already unwell at Missolonghi, he could not help giving way to pleasantry and childish play to such a degree that good Dr. Kennedy, when he wished to convert him to his somewhat intolerant orthodoxy at Cephalonia, found one of the obstacles to consist in the difficulty of keeping Lord Byron serious.

"He was fond," says the Doctor, "of saying smart and witty things, and never allowed an opportunity of punning to escape him. . . . . He generally showed high spirits and hilarity. . . . . I have heard him say several witty things; but as I was always anxious to keep him grave and present important subjects for his consideration, after allow-

ing the laugh to pass I again endeavoured to resume the seriousness of the conversation, whilst his Lordship constantly did the same."

And then Kennedy adds :—" My impression from them was, that they were unworthy a man of his accomplishments : I mean the desire of jesting." *

These words well characterise the honest Methodist, who, like many other good and noble minds, yet could not understand fun. This incapability is also sometimes the case with persons of a sour, ill-natured, or susceptible disposition, whose excessive vanity is shocked at all simple, innocent explosions of gaiety and pleasantry.† Colonel Stanhope, who knew Lord Byron at the same period, and who was not a Methodist, but who from other causes could not appreciate the poet's vivacious wit, said :—

" The mind of Lord Byron was like a volcano, full of fire and wrath, sometimes calm, often dazzling and playful. . . . . As a companion," he adds, " no one could be more amusing than Lord Byron ; he had neither pedantry nor affectation about him, but was natural and playful as a boy. His conversation resembled a stream : sometimes smooth, sometimes rapid, and sometimes rushing down in cataracts. It was a mixture of philosophy and slang, of everything,—like his ' Don Juan.' He was a patient, and in general a very attentive, listener. When, however, he did engage with earnestness in conversation, his ideas succeeded each other with such uncommon rapidity that he could not control them. They burst from him impetuously ; and although he both attended to and noticed the remarks of others, yet he

* Kennedy, p. 301.

† See Galt, with regard to Hunt.

did not allow these to check his discourse for an instant."

"There was usually," writes Count Gamba, his friend and companion in Greece, in his interesting work, entitled 'Last Travels of Lord Byron in Greece,' "a liveliness of spirit and a tendency to joke, even at times of great danger, when other men would have become serious and pre-occupied. This disposition of mind gave him a kind of air of frankness and sincerity which was quite irresistible with those persons even who were most prejudiced against him."

This allusion of Count Gamba refers to the letter which Byron wrote in the midst of the Suliotes, among whom he had taken refuge during the storm and to escape the Turks.

"If anything," writes Lord Byron, on the point of embarking for Missolonghi, and in his last letter to Moore, "if anything in the way of fever, fatigue, famine, or otherwise, should cut short the middle age of a brother warbler, like Garcilasso de la Vega, I pray you remember me in 'your smiles and wine.'

"I have hopes that the cause will triumph; but, whether it does or no, still 'honour must be minded as strictly as a milk diet.' I trust to observe both.

"BYRON."

"It is matter of history," continues Count Gamba, "that Lord Byron, in consequence of vexations to which he was ever a victim, added to the rigorous diet which he followed (he only fed upon vegetables and green tea, to show that he could live as frugally

as a Greek soldier), and from the impossibility which he found to take any exercise at Missolonghi, had a nervous fit, which deprived him of the power of speech and alarmed all his friends and acquaintances. When the crisis had worn off, he merely laughed over it."

"Even at Missolonghi," says Parry, who knew him there only in the midst of troubles and vexations of every description and quite at the close of his life, "he loved to jest in words and actions. These pleasantries lightened his spirits, and prevented him from dwelling on disagreeable thoughts."

Perhaps this disposition of character was the result of his French origin, for it is scarcely known or even appreciated in England.

"Yet," exclaims the greatest-minded woman of our day (Madame G. Sand), "it is that disposition which forms the charm of every delicate intimacy, and which often prevents our committing many follies and stupidities.

"To look for the ridiculous side of things is to discover their weakness. To laugh at the dangers in the midst of which we find ourselves is to get accustomed to brave them; like the French, who go into action with a laugh and a song. To quiz a friend is often to save him from a weakness in which our pity might perhaps have allowed him to linger. To laugh at oneself is to preserve oneself from the effects of an exaggerated self-love. I have noticed that the people who never joke are gifted with a childish and insupportable vanity."

Nevertheless, there are high and noble natures

that never laugh, and are incapable of understanding the pleasures of gaiety. But minds like these have some vacuum; they certainly lack what is called wit.

Lord Byron's gaiety, full of dazzling wit and varied tints, like his other faculties, never went beyond the limits befitting its exercise in a beautiful soul. As much as the truly ridiculous, that which a great writer has defined, "*the strength, small or great, of a free being, out of proportion with its end*,"—as much, I say, as the truly ridiculous attracted and amused him, just as much did grave, moral, and physical disorders, produced by corruption of body or soul, sadden and repel his nature, so full of harmony. He could never laugh at these latter. The grave disorders of soul that exist in free beings, and that are therefore voluntary, raised sadness, anger, or indignation in him, according to the degree of vice or disorder. We need seek no other origin for his bitterest satires in verse and prose. Great ugliness and physical defects certainly inspired him with great disgust, consequent upon his passion for the beautiful; but, at the same time, involuntary misfortunes excited his liveliest compassion, often testified by the most generous deeds.

We know, for instance, that Lord Byron had a defect in one of his feet, but a defect so slight —although it has been greatly exaggerated—that people have never been able to say in which of the two feet it did exist. Nor did it in any way diminish the grace and activity all his movements displayed. If its existence were painful for him, that must have been because his sense of harmony

looked upon this defect as detrimental to the perfection of his physical beauty. But whatever may have been the cause of this sensibility, it sufficed in any case to make him feel a generous compassion for all those afflicted with any defect analogous to his own. Lord Harrington, then Colonel Stanhope, says :—

"Contrary to what we observe in most people, Lord Byron, who was always very sensitive to the sufferings of others, showed greatest sympathy for those who had any imperfection akin to his own." At Ravenna, his favourite beggar limped. And on him Lord Byron bestowed the privilege of picking up all the largest coins struck down by his dexterous pistol-shots in the forest of pines. We have said he never laughed at any involuntary defect, not even at a person falling (as is so often the case), for fear it might have been caused by bodily weakness; neither did he ridicule any of the weaknesses or shortcomings of intelligence.

He did not laugh at a bad poet on account of his bad verses. When he was at Pisa, an Irishman there was engaged in translating the 'Divine Comedy.' The translation was very heavy and faulty; but the translator was most enthusiastic about the great poet, and absolutely lived on the hope of getting his work published. All the English at Pisa, including the kind Shelley, were turning him into ridicule. Lord Byron alone would not join in the laugh. T——'s sincerity won for him grace and compassion. Indeed, Lord Byron did still more; for he wrote and entreated Murray to publish the work, so as to give

the poor poet this consolation. Not content with that step, he wrote to Moore to beg Jeffrey not to criticise him, undertaking himself to ask Gifford the same thing, through Murray. "Perhaps they might speak of the commentaries without touching on the text," said he; and then he added, with his usual pleasantry, "However, we must not trust to it. *Those dogs! the text is too tempting.*" *

Nor did he laugh at exaggerated devotion, even if it were extravagant or superstitious, provided he thought it sincere. Countess G——, paternal aunt of Countess G——, the greatest beauty of Romagna in 1800, had fallen into such extreme mystical devotion, through the brutal jealousy of her husband, that she died in the odour of sanctity. This lady wrote to her brother, Count G——, at Genoa, saying how happy she was, and giving no end of praise to "the good Jesuit Fathers," and speaking of her devotion to St. Teresa. Madame G——, having sent one of these letters to Lord Byron, he answered: "I consider all that as *very respectable*, and, moreover, *enviable*. The aunt is right; I wish I could love the good fathers and St. Teresa. After all, what does this devotee of St. Teresa, this friend of the good Jesuit Fathers, want? Happiness; and she has found it! What else are we seeking for?"

We have already seen elsewhere† that Lord Byron never, at any period of his life, laughed at religion or its *sincere* votaries, whatever might be their creed of belief. Provided their errors came from the heart, they commanded his respect. Dallas himself,

* Moore, Letter 468.

† See article on 'Religion.'

in reference to the sceptical stanzas of his twenty-second year, cannot help rendering him justice.

"I have not noticed," says he, "a spirit of mockery in you; and you have the little-known art of not wishing that others should be of your opinion in matters of religious belief. I am less disinterested; I have the greatest desire, nay, even a great hope, to see you some day believe as I do." We have seen, also, what Kennedy said of him in Greece.* Dr. Millingen bears the same testimony:—

"During the whole of the time that I visited him, I never heard him utter a single word of contempt for the Christian religion. On the contrary, he used often to say, that nothing could be more reprehensible than to turn into ridicule those who believed in it, since in this strange world it is equally difficult to arrive at knowing what one is or is not to believe; and since many freethinkers teach doctrines which are as much beyond the reach of human comprehension as the mysteries of the revelation itself."

When, by habit of looking at serious things from their absurd and ridiculous side, he feared he had done the same with regard to some religious ceremony, he at once hastened to explain himself. Thus he writes to Moore from Pisa:—

"I am afraid that this sounds flippant, but I don't mean it to be so; only my turn of mind is so given to taking things in the absurd point of view, that it breaks out in spite of me every now and then. Still, I do assure you that I am a very good Christian. Whether you believe me in this, I do not know."

* See chapter on 'Religion.'

But much as he respected sincere religious feelings, equally did he detest that hypocrisy which despises in secret the idol it adores in public. Even at the transition period of what has been called his scepticism, it was extremely distasteful to him to speak against religion, to despise and mock even the hollow worship practised outwardly from human motives and personal interest. In Livadia at this time he met with a Greek bishop, whose actions were quite at variance with his language. How great the antipathy Lord Byron conceived for him, may be seen by the notes appended to the first and second cantos of 'Childe Harold.' For the Pharisees of our days he felt all the anger due to whited sepulchres. No, certainly, it was not true virtue in general, nor any one virtue in particular, that he laughed at sometimes; nor was it friendship, or love, or religion, or any truly respectable sentiment that ever excited his mirth. He only ridiculed semblances, vain appearances, when those who paraded them did so from *personal interest*. Lord Byron knew too well, by experience, that many virtues admired and set forth as such do but wear a mask in reality; and he thought it useful for society to divest them of it, and show the hidden visage. Why should he have shown any consideration for the virtue that patronises charity-balls, in order to acquire the right of violating, with impunity, the duties of a Christian wife? or that other female virtue which weighs itself in the balance with the privilege of directing Almacks? or that, wishing to unite the advantages of modesty with the gratification of passion? In short, why should he have shown consideration for persons whose merit consists in never *allowing*

themselves to be seen as they are? He was very disrespectful, likewise, towards certain friendships that he knew by experience to be full of wordy counsel, but finding nothing to say in the way of consolation or defence. This peculiar variety of friendship had made him suffer greatly. In his serious poems he calls it "*the loss of his illusions*;" and expresses himself with misanthropical indignation, or with a bleeding heart. But, returning to a milder philosophy, he ended by smiling and jesting at it, in words like these :—

> "Look'd grave and pale to see her friend's fragility,
> For which most friends reserve their sensibility."

Seriously; was he bound to any great tenderness towards such friendship as that? And does it not suffice to set Lord Byron right with *true friendship* to hear him say, after having laughed about false friends :—

> "But this is not my maxim: had it been,
> Some heart-aches had been spared me: yet I care not—
> I would not be a tortoise in his screen
> Of stubborn shell, which waves and weather wear not.
> 'Tis better, on the whole, to have felt and seen
> That which humanity may bear, or bear not:
> 'T will teach discernment to the sensitive,
> And not to pour their ocean in a sieve." *

Friendship was so necessary to him that he wrote to Moore, on the eve of his marriage, 15th of October, 1814 :—

"An' there were anything in marriage that would make a difference between my friends and me, particularly in your case, I would none on't."

People should read all he said of Lord Clare and

* 'Don Juan,' canto xiv.

Moore, and see with what almost jealous susceptibility he guarded the title of friend,* before they can understand the value he attached to true friendship. But among many of the *privileges* he conceded to friendship, *duties* also held their place.

And if we pass from friendship to love, could he really bestow such respect on the loves of a Lady Adeline, or of those who, he said, "embrace you to-day, thinking of the novel they will write to-morrow." His ideal of true love has been noticed; and he became impatient when he saw it confounded with anything else. At twenty-two years of age he wrote to his young friend, the Rev. Mr. Harness:—

"I told you the fate of B—— and H—— in my last. So much for these sentimentalists, who console themselves in their stews for the loss—the never-to-be-recovered loss—the despair of the refined attachment of a couple of drabs! You censure my life, Harness: when I compare myself with these men, my elders and my betters, I really begin to conceive myself a monument of prudence—a walking statue—without feeling or failing; and yet the world in general hath given me a proud pre-eminence over them in profligacy. Yet I like the men; and, God knows, ought not to condemn their aberrations. But I own I feel provoked when they dignify all this by the name of love—romantic attachments for things marketable for a dollar!"

Yes, Lord Byron never did respect the love that can be bartered for dollars. And afterwards, when irritation had given way to a milder and more tolerant philosophy, he took the liberty of laughing at it, both

* See Lord Byron's letter to Mrs. Shelley.

in prose and verse. It may, however, be urged against him, that he sometimes turned into ridicule even his deepest sentiments; and Moore remarks this as a defect, apropos of the jesting tone he assumed once at Bologna, when writing to Hoppner. But Moore forgets to say, that while his heart called him to Ravenna, he was speaking against the counsels given by Hoppner, who, in order to deter him from this visit, for reasons previously cited,* had made the darkest prognostications regarding its consequences; and though he could not shake Lord Byron's determination, it is very probable that he may have upset his imagination. Thus he was trying to show himself ready for everything. Such pleasantries are like the song of one who is alarmed in the dark. Moreover, from his manner of judging human nature, and his lively sense of the ridiculous, Lord Byron was well aware that a light tone is alone admissible for speaking to others of a love they do not share, and more especially when they disapprove of it. He felt that the gaiety of Ovid and the gallantry of Horace are better suited to indifferent people than Petrarch's high-flown phrases and sentimentalities, or Werther's despair. It was through this same nice perception of the sentiments entertained by indifferent individuals that he sometimes adopted a light, playful tone in conversation, or in his correspondence, when speaking of friendship, devoted feelings of any kind, and a host of sentiments very serious and deep within his own heart, but which he believed less calculated to interest others. And if sometimes his singular penetration of the human heart called forth mockery,

* See his 'Life in Italy.'

it sprang more frequently from seeing fine sentiments put forth in flagrant contradiction with conduct, or morality looked upon as a mere thing of outward decorum, speedily to be set aside, if once the actors were removed from the eyes of the world. He would not grant his esteem to fine sentiments expressed by writers who could be bribed; to the promises of heroes who noisily enrol combatants, while themselves remaining safe by their fireside; or to the generosity that displays itself from a balcony. And, assuredly, he had a right to be particular in his estimate of this latter virtue, which he himself always practised secretly, and in the shade. He would not consent to its being bartered, nor that people should have the honour of it without any sacrifice on their part. Thus he replied to Moore, who was in an ecstasy about the generosity of Lord some one:—"I shall believe all that when you prove to me that there is no advantage in openly helping a man like you." With wonderful, and, I might almost say, supernatural perspicacity, Lord Byron penetrated into the arcana of souls, and did not come out thence with a very good opinion of what he had seen. But, kind as he was, he did not like to probe too deeply the motives of others, especially as a rule of action for himself. As he says in his admirable satire of 'Don Juan,'—

> "'Tis sad to burrow deep to roots of things,
> So much are they besmeared with earth."

Lastly, his mockeries were all directed against the vice he most abhorred—*hypocrisy*; for he looked upon that as a gangrene to the soul, the cause of most of the evils that afflict society, and certainly of all his own

misfortunes. As long as he was obliged to bear it, under the depressing influence of England's misty atmosphere, he felt by turns saddened and indignant. But when he reached Italy, his soul caught the bright rays that emanate from a southern sky, and he preferred to combat hypocrisy with the lighter weapons of pleasantry. But whichsoever arm he wielded, he always pursued the enemy remorselessly, following into every fastness; of which none knew better than himself each winding and each resource. For hypocrisy had been the bane of his life; it had rendered useless for happiness that combination he possessed of Heaven's choicest gifts; the plenitude of affections, numberless qualities most charming in domestic life, for he had been exiled from the family circle. Hypocrisy had *forced* him to despise a country also that could act towards him like an unnatural parent, rather than a true mother, wounding him with calumnies, and obstinately depreciating him, solely because she allowed hypocrisy to reign on her soil. Such, then, were the virtues which he permitted himself to mock at.

"*We must not make out a ridicule where none exists,*" says La Bruyère; but it is well to see that which has a being, and to draw it forth gracefully, in a manner that may both please and instruct.

As to true, holy, pure, undeniable virtues, no one more than he admired and respected them. "Any trait of virtue or courage," says one of his biographers, "caused him deep emotion, and would draw tears from his eyes, provided always he were convinced that it had not been actuated by a desire of shining or producing effect."

"A generous action," says another, "the remembrance of patriotism, personal sacrifice, disinterestedness, would cause in him the most sublime emotions, the most brilliant thoughts." The more his opinion as to the rarity of virtue appeared to him well-founded, the more did he render homage when he met with it. The more he felt the difficulty of overcoming passions, the more did a victory gained over them excite his admiration.

"Pray make my respects to Mrs. Hoppner, and assure her of my unalterable reverence for the singular goodness of her disposition, which is not without its reward even in this world. For those who are no great believers in human virtues would discover enough in her to give them a better opinion of their fellow-creatures, and—what is still more difficult—of themselves, as being of the same species, however inferior in approaching its nobler models."

At Coppet he was more touched by the conjugal affection of the young Duchesse de Broglie for her husband, than he was attracted by the genius even of her mother, Madame de Stäel. "Nothing," says he in his Memoranda, "was more agreeable than to see the manifestation of domestic tenderness in this young woman." When he received at Pisa the posthumous message sent by a beautiful, angelic, young creature, who had caught a glimpse of him but once, and who, nevertheless, in the solemn hours of her agony, thought of him, and prayed to God for him, it made a deep impression on his mind.

"In the evening," says Madame G——, "he spoke to me at great length of this piety and touching virtue."

Mr. Stendhall, who knew him during his stay at Milan in 1816, says:—

"I passed almost all my evenings with Lord Byron. Whenever this singular man was excited and spoke with enthusiasm, his sentiments were noble, great, and generous; in short, worthy of his genius."

And then, when Mr. Stendhall speaks of walking alone with him in the large green-room at La Scala, he adds:—

"Lord Byron made his appearance for half an hour every evening, holding the most delightful conversation it was ever my good fortune to hear. A volume of new ideas and generous sentiments came pouring out in such novel form, that one fancied oneself enjoying them for the first time. The rest of the evening the great man lapsed into the English noble."

Even biographers most hostile to Lord Byron render justice to his sensibility and respect for real virtue, for all that is true and estimable. And if we seek proofs of the same in his poems and correspondence, we shall find it at every page, not excepting 'Don Juan,'—the satire that most exposed him to the anger and calumny of *cant*. This is why I shall confine myself to borrowing quotations from this poem. For instance, in speaking of military glory, he says:—

"The drying up a single tear has more
Of honest fame, than shedding seas of gore.

And why?—because it brings self-approbation;
Whereas the other, after all its glare,
Shouts, bridges, arches, pensions from a nation,
* * * *
Are nothing but a child of Murder's rattles."*

* 'Don Juan,' canto viii.

And then again :—

"*One* life saved . . . . .
. . . . is a thing to recollect
Far sweeter than the greenest laurels sprung
From the manure of human clay, though deck'd
With all the praises ever said or sung;
Though hymn'd by every harp, unless within
Your heart join chorus, Fame is but a din." *

When he speaks of Souvaroff, who, with a hand still reeking from the massacre of 40,000 combatants, began his despatch to the Autocrat in these words :—

"Glory to *God* and to the Empress [Catherine]! Ismail's ours!"

Lord Byron exclaims :—

"Powers
Eternal! such names mingled!

"Methinks these are the most tremendous words,
Since 'Mené, Mené, Tekel,' and 'Upharsin,'
Which hands or pens have ever traced of swords.
Heaven help me! I'm but little of a parson:
What Daniel read was shorthand of the Lord's,
Severe, sublime; the prophet wrote no farce on
The fate of nations;—but this Russ so witty
Could rhyme, like Nero, o'er a burning city.

"He wrote this Polar melody, and set it,
Duly accompanied by shrieks and groans,
Which few will sing, I trust, but none forget it—
For I will teach, if possible, the stones
To rise against earth's tyrants." †

And then, when he speaks of truly virtuous men—the Washingtons and Franklins—those who preferred a quiet, retired life; so as better to walk in the paths of justice and goodness, like the ancient heroes of Sparta, one feels that his words come really from the heart. But if I wished to make extracts of all the proofs contained in his works, of respect and

* 'Don Juan,' canto ix. † 'Don Juan,' canto viii.

enthusiasm for true virtue, a volume of quotations would be requisite. Thus I have only chosen some at hazard, selecting them principally from that admirable satire of 'Don Juan,' which combines more deep philosophy and true morality than is to be found in the works of many moralists; and I may likewise say more wit, and knowledge of the human heart, more kindness and indulgence, than ever before were united in a volume of verse or prose, and more, perhaps, than ever will be. Yet, despite of all this, the independence, boldness, and, above all, the true state of things revealed in 'Don Juan,' excited great anger throughout the political, religious, and moral world of England; indeed, passion went so far in distorting, that the tendency and moral bearing of the poem were quite misunderstood. With regard to France, where this satire is only known through a prose translation, which mars half its cleverness, 'Don Juan' serves, however, the purpose of an inexhaustible reservoir, whence writers unwittingly draw much they deem their own. Besides, from analogy of race, he is, perhaps, better appreciated in France than in his own country; for few English do understand what true justice he rendered himself when he said,—that, in point of fact, his character was far too lenient, the greatest proof of his muse's discontent being a smile.

But if, despite all this evidence, people should still persist, as is very possible, in asserting that Lord Byron ridiculed, satirised, and denied the existence of real virtues, at least we would ask to have these virtues named, so as to be able to answer. What are the virtues so insulted? Is it truth? piety? gene-

rosity? firmness? abnegation? devotedness? independence? patriotism? humanity? heroism? But if he denied not one of these, if he only ridiculed and satirized their semblances, their hypocritical shadows, then let critics and envious minds—the ignorant, or the would-be ignorant—let them cease, in the name of justice, thus to offer lying insult to a great spirit no longer able to defend himself.

Perhaps he did not render sufficient homage to that great and respectable virtue of his country—conjugal fidelity; but he has told us why. It appeared to him that this virtue, supposed to stamp society, was, in truth, more a pretence than a reality among the higher classes in England; and, if he examined his own heart, this virtue wore a name for him that had been the martyrdom of his whole life.

I may say, farther, that when he saw a truth shining at the expense of some hypocrisy, he did not *shut it up in his casket of precious things*, to carry them with him to the grave, nor did he only name them in a low voice to his secretaries, because by *speaking aloud he might have done some harm to himself* (as, however, the great Goethe did and *acknowledged*). Lord Byron, without thinking of the consequences that might ensue to himself, deemed, on the contrary, that truth ought to be courageously unveiled: and to the heroism of deeds he added the heroism of words.

It must not be forgotten, either, that there existed a certain kind of timidity among the other elements of his character, and that jesting often helps to season a tiresome conversation, rendering it less difficult, besides enabling us to hide our real sentiments.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MELANCHOLY OF LORD BYRON.

"To know the real cause of our sadness is near akin to knowing what we are worth."—PARADOL, *Study on Moralists.*

FROM all that we have said, and judging from that natural tendency of his mind to look at even serious things on the ridiculous, laughable side, would it be correct to infer that Lord Byron was always gay, and never melancholy? Those maintaining such an opinion, would have to bear too many contradictions. Physiology, psychology, and history, would together protest against such an assertion. We affirm, on the contrary, that Lord Byron was often melancholy; but that, in order to judge well the nature and shades of his melancholy, it is necessary to analyse and observe it, not only in his writings, but also in his conduct through life. Whence arose his melancholy? Was it one of those moral infirmities, incurable and causeless, commencing from the cradle, like that of René, whose childhood was morose, and whose youth disdainful; who, ere he had known life, seemed to bend beneath its mysteries; who knowing not how to be young, will no more know how to be old; who in all things wanted order, proportion, harmony, truth; who had nothing to produce equilibrium between the power of genius and the indolence of will? This kind of melancholy is fatal to the practice of any

virtue, and seems like a sacrifice of heart on the altar of pride. Was it a melancholy like Werther's, whose senses, stimulated by passion, of which society opposed the development, carried perturbation also into the moral regions? Was it the deep mysterious ailment of Hamlet, at once both meek and full of logic? or the sickness of that "masculine breast with feeble arms;" "of that philosopher who only wanted strength to become a saint;" "of that bird without wings," said a woman of genius, "that exhales its calm melancholy plaint on the shores whence vessels depart, and where only shivered remnants return;" the melancholy of an Obermann, whose goodness and almost ascetic virtues are palsied for want of equilibrium, and whose discouragement and ennui were only calculated to exercise a baneful influence over the individual, and over humanity? No; the *striking* characteristics that exist in all these sorts of melancholy are utterly wanting to Lord Byron's. His was not a melancholy that had become chronic, like René's, ere arriving at life's maturity. For, whereas, the child René was gloomy and wearied, the child Byron was passionate and sensitive, but gay, amusing and frolicsome. His fits of melancholy were only developed under the action of thought, reflection, and circumstances. Nor was it Werther's kind of melancholy; for, even at intensest height of passion, reason never abandoned its sway over Lord Byron's energetic soul; with himself, if not with his heroes, personal sacrifice always took, or wished to take, the place of satisfied passion.

It was not that of Hamlet, for a single instant's dissimulation would have been impossible for Lord

Byron. It was not that of Obermann: for his energetic nature could not partake the weakness and powerlessness of Oberon; his strength equalled his genius.

It was not, either, that of Childe Harold, for this hero of his first poem is, in the first and second Canto, the personification of youthful exquisites, with senses dulled and satiated by excesses to which Lord Byron had never yielded when he composed this type, since he was then only twenty-one years of age, and had hardly quitted the University, where he lived surrounded by intellectual friends, who have all testified to his mode of life there, and then at Newstead Abbey, where he may have become a little dissipated, but still without any excess capable of engendering satiety. Nor was his melancholy that of the darker heroes he has described in 'Lara' and 'Manfred,' for he never knew remorse; and we have already seen to what must be attributed all these identifications between himself and his heroes.*

In general, these kinds of melancholy have other causes, or else they arise from individual organisation. With him, on the contrary, melancholy always originated from some moral external cause, which would tend to show, that without such cause, his melancholy would not have existed, or else might have been quite overcome. But, before arriving at a definition, we must analyse it, after taking a rapid glance at his whole life.

It has even been said, that our conduct in early years offers a sure indication of our future; that the man does but continue the child. Let us then begin

* See the Introduction.

by studying Byron during his childhood. We know from the testimony of his nurses and preceptors, both in Scotland and England, that goodness, sensibility, tenderness, and likewise gaiety, with a tendency to jesting, formed the basis of his character. Nevertheless, a yearning after solitude led him into solitary distant walks, along the sea-shore when he was living at Aberdeen, or amid the wild poetic mountains of Scotland, near the romantic banks of the Dee, often putting his life in danger, and causing much alarm to his mother. But this sprang simply from his ardent nature, which, far from inclining him to melancholy, made earth seem like a paradise.

Has he not described these ecstasies of his childhood in 'Tasso's Lament:'—

"From my very birth my soul was drunk with love," &c.

This want of solitude became still more remarkable as reflection acquired further development. At Harrow, he would leave his favourite games and dear companions to go and sit alone on the stone which bears his name. But this want of living alone sometimes in the fairyland of his imagination, feeding on his own sentiments, and the bright illusions of his youthful soul; was that what is yclept melancholy? No, no; what he experienced was but the harbinger of genius, destined to dazzle the world; Disraeli, that great observer of the race of geniuses, so affirms:—

"Eagles fly alone," exclaims Sydney, "while sheep are ever to be found in flocks."

Almost all men of genius have experienced this precocious desire of solitude. But Lord Byron, who united so many contrasts, and, according to Moore, the

faculties of several men, had also much of the child about him. And, while almost all children belonging to the race of great intellects, have neither taste nor aptitude for bodily exercises and games of dexterity; he, by exception to the general rule, on coming out of his reveries, experienced equally the want of giving himself up passionately to the play and stir of companions who were inferior to him in intelligence. Up to this, then, we can discover no symptom in him of that *fatal* kind of melancholy,—that which is *hereditary* and *causeless*. But anon, his heart begins to beat high, and the boy already courts aspirations, ardent desires, illusions that may well be destined to agitate, afflict, or even overwhelm him. Meanwhile let us follow him from Harrow to the vacations passed at Nottingham and Southwell. There we shall see him acting plays with enthusiasm, making himself the life of the social circle assembled round the amiable Pigott family, delighting in music, and writing his first effusions in verse. Certainly it was not melancholy that predominated in his early poems, but rather generosity, kindness, sincerity, the ardour of a loving heart, the aspiration after all that is passionate, noble, great, virtuous and heroic; but these verses also make us feel by a thousand delicate shades of sentiment portrayed, and by cherished illusions pertinaciously held, that melancholy may hereafter succeed in making new passage for itself, and finding out the path to that loving, passionate heart. And, in truth, it did more than once penetrate there. For death snatched from him, first, two dear companions of his childhood, and then the young cousin, who beneath an angel's guise on earth, first

awakened the fire of love. And afterwards Lord Byron gave his heart, of fifteen, to another affection, was deceived, met with no return,* but, on the contrary, was sorely wounded. Yet all the melancholy thus engendered was accidental and factitious, springing from the excessive sensibility of his physical and moral being, as well as from circumstances; his griefs resembled the usual griefs of youth. It was in these dispositions that he quitted Harrow for Cambridge University. There, one of the greatest sorrows of his life overtook him. It was a complex sentiment, made up of regret at having left his beloved Harrow, of grief at the recent loss of a cherished affection, and, lastly, sadness caused by a very modest and very singular feeling for a youth of his age; he regretted no longer feeling himself a child, which regret can only be explained by a presentiment of therefore soon being called on to renounce other illusions. This is how he spoke of it still, when at Ravenna, in 1821:—

"It was one of the most fatal and crushing sentiments of my life, to feel that I was no longer a child."

He fell ill from it. But all these sorts of melancholy, arising from *palpable avowed* causes, having their origin in the heart, might equally find their cure in the heart. Already did imagination transport him towards his beloved Ida, and he consoled himself by saying, that if love has wings, friendship ought to have none. If this were an illusion, he completed it by writing that charming poem of his youth, 'Friendship is Love without Wings.' †

At Cambridge he met again one of his dearest

* See chapter on 'Generosity.' † See chapter on 'Friendships.'

friends from Harrow, Edward Long; he also made acquaintance with the amiable Eddlestone, and his melancholy disappeared in the genial atmosphere of friendship. As long as these dear friends remained near him he was happy, even at Cambridge. But they were called to different careers, and destiny separated them. Long, with whom he had passed such happy days,* left the first to go into the guards. Eddlestone remained: but Lord Byron himself was already about to quit Cambridge. During the vacation, we see him modestly preparing his first poems intended as an offering to friendship; then going to a watering-place with some respectable friends; devoting himself with ardour to dramatic representations at the amateur theatre at Southwell, where he was more than ever the life of society; and thus he remained a whole year away from Cambridge, often seeing his dear Long again in London, and visiting Harrow with him. When he returned, in 1807, to Cambridge, Long had already left, and Eddlestone was shortly to go; thus, he no longer heard the song of that amiable youth, nor the flute of his dear Long, and melancholy well nigh seized hold on him. Nevertheless, he consoled himself with projects for the future. Besides, he was already nineteen years of age, had made some progress in the journey of life, probably leaving some illusions behind him on the bushes that lined the roadside, and perhaps his soul had already lost somewhat of its early purity. He had certainly seen that many things in the moral world were far removed from the ideal forms with which he had invested them; that love, even friendship, virtue,

* See chapter on 'Friendships.'

patriotism, generosity, and goodness, by no means attained the height of his first convictions. A year before, he had said: "I have tasted the joy and the bitterness of love." Willingly again would he have given way to the emotions of his heart; but he too soon perceived that to do so were a useless, dangerous luxury,—a language scarcely understood in the world in which he moved; that the idols he had believed of precious metal, were, in reality, made of vile clay. Then he also resolved on taking his degrees in vice; but, unlike others, he did so *with disgust*, and he called satiety, not the *quantity*, but the *quality* of the aliment. A year before he had also said: "*I have found that a friend may promise and yet deceive.*"

Magnanimous as he was, he made advances to the guilty friend, and took half the blame on himself; but in vain was he generous, saying, with tears that flowed from his heart to his pen:—

> "You knew that my soul, that my heart, my existence,
> If danger demanded, were wholly your own;
> You knew me unalter'd by years or by distance,
> Devoted to love and to friendship alone."

And then:—

> "Repentance will cancel the vow you have made."

And again:—

> "With me no corroding resentment shall live:
> My bosom is calm'd by the simple reflection,
> That both may be wrong, and that both should forgive."

The friend did not return, and Lord Byron's generous, pure, delicate nature—fearful lest he might be in the wrong—could only find peace in trying to offer reparation. He wrote to Lord Clare:—

"I have, therefore, made all the reparation in my power, by apologising for my mistake, though with very faint hopes of success. His answer has not arrived, and, most probably, never will. However, I have eased my own conscience by the atonement, which is humiliating enough to one of my disposition; yet, I could not have slept satisfied with the reflection of having, even unintentionally, injured any individual. I have done all that could be done to repair the injury, and there the affair must rest. Whether we renew our intimacy or not is of very trivial consequence."

But although he could no longer rely entirely upon his heart for defending his loved illusions so cruelly attacked by reality, yet it was not possible for him to put out of sight his ideal of all the beauties of soul whose presence was a condition of his being. And it was this presence that made material dissipated life, and also the intellectual routine existence at Granta, both appear so unattractive to him. He wrote a satire on them, and the blame inflicted shows his fine nature. When evil was thus judged, thus condemned, alike by pen and heart, there could be no real danger; not even had it power to sadden him. A more formidable peril menaced him from another side. Sadness might now reach his heart through his mind. That deep intellect, so given to analyse, meditate, generalize, from childhood upwards, according to the relative capacity of age, was ever busy with the great problems of life. It has been seen that he began to worry even his nurses with childish questions, and afterwards much more to embarrass his tutors, masters, &c., and especially the

excellent Dr. Glenny at Dulwich. A natural tendency fortified by early religious education evidently drew his heart to God; but, on the other hand, a logical mind, fond of investigating everything, made him experience the necessity of examining his grounds of belief. The answers, all ready prepared, made to him on great questions could not satisfy him; he required to discuss their basis. Already the increasing play of his faculties had been revealed in that beautiful Prayer to the Divinity which constitutes his profession of faith and worship, "every line of which," says Moore, "is instinct with fervent sadness, as of a heart that grieves at loss of its illusions."

On arriving this year at Cambridge, he found, amid a circle of intellectual companions which Moore calls "a brilliant pleiad," a young man of genius, an extraordinary thinker, a mind that had, perhaps, some affinity to his own, but which, devoid of his sensibility and logic, surpassed him in hardihood; a bold spirit, striving to scrutinize the inscrutable, and, not content with analysis, desirous to arrive at *conclusions*. Through the natural influence of example, and more especially the irresistible fascination exercised by a great intelligence, uniting also the spirit of fun, so amusing to Lord Byron because so like his own; from all these causes, Mathews exercised an immense influence over him. This young man loved to plunge his head into depths from whence he emerged all dizzy. Lord Byron was guided by too reasonable a mind to arrive at such results. He refused to follow where deformity and evil were to ensue, and persisted still in looking upwards. Still, however, he allowed his eyes to wander over the

magic glass, where danced a few pretended certainties conjoined with a host of doubts. The first he rejected, as too antipathetic to his soul, but perhaps he did not sufficiently repel all the doubts. And, being no longer alarmed at sounding such depths, he imbibed seeds of doctrine capable of producing incredulity or, at least, scepticism. Happily these seeds required a dry soil to fructify, and his, being so rich, they *perished*, after a short period of wretched existence. All these influences, and this precocious experience, were for him at this time a sort of personification of Mephistopheles, although not entailing serious consequences; for in the main his belief was not deeply shaken. It had no other effect than to throw him, for a time, into uncertainty on points necessary to him, "and to teach him," says Moore, "to feel less embarrassed in a *sort* of scepticism."

This disagreement between his reason and his aspirations becoming deeper and wider, his mind ceased always to follow his heart. But the latter following rather the former, though with sadness and fatigue, and all the problems of life becoming more and more enveloped in darkness, it is possible that he passed through gloomy hours, wherein equivocal expressions escaped his pen. In a word, if he avoided dizziness, he was not equally fortunate with regard to ennui.

"Ennui," says the clever Viscomte d'Yzarn de Freissinet, in his deep and delightful book, '*Les Pensées grises*,' "ennui is felt by ordinary minds because they cannot understand earth, and by superior ones because they cannot understand heaven."

Let us now observe Byron after he had taken his

degrees at the University, and when about to enter into possession of his estates. On seeing this young nobleman of twenty, almost an orphan, commence his career perfectly independent, call around him at Newstead Abbey his dear companions of Harrow and Cambridge, make up masquerades with them, don the costume of abbots and monks, pass the nights in running about his own parks and the heather of Sherwood Forest, and the days amid youthful eccentricities, amiable hospitality, and London dissipation, it would seem as if this odd, shifting, noisy kind of life, however efficient for developing knowledge of men and things, must inevitably obliterate all trace of melancholy.

But it was not so; the responsibilities of life began too soon for him, and the joyous horizon of his twentieth year was already dotted with black marks indicative of the approaching tempest. In the first place, the cassock of a real priest never reposed on a heart more sensitive, endowed with feelings deeper and less hostile to audacity of mind. Moreover, the griefs of his boyhood had sown seeds of sadness in his heart, and the unjust cruel criticism lavished on his early poems had already inflicted a deep wound. Lord Byron, it is true, thought to heal this by writing a satire; still, despite the vein of pleasantry indulged, he continued to discipline his mind by serious study of the great masters of literature and of the deepest thinkers.

It must be acknowledged that the balm he sought in *satire, was* a dangerous caustic which, while closing one wound, might well cause others to open. At the same time, the money embarrassments inherited from

his predecessor in the estate went on accumulating, and the period was approaching when the cassock, donned in boyish fun, was to be exchanged for the grave ermine of a peer of the realm. Who should present him, then, to the noble assembly, if not his guardian, and near relative, the Earl of Carlisle? The young lord had always met his coldness with deference and respect, even dedicating his early poems to him. But the noble earl now still further aggravated his unkind conduct towards his ward by abandoning him at this solemn moment. Not only did he refuse to lend countenance himself, but he even hurt and wounded Lord Byron by interposing delays so as to prevent or put off his reception in the House of Peers; and that, *solely because he did not like the young man's mother!* It would be impossible for the most loving heart, the one most susceptible of family affections, not to have felt cruelly, under such circumstances, the absence of near ties, and Lord Byron did not then know his sister. Suffer he did, of course; and, had it not been for a distant relative, despite his high birth and wondrous gifts, he must have entered the august assembly accompanied only by his title. However frivolous the young man might have appeared, he was not so in reality; and he hesitated at this time between a project of travelling for information, and the desire to take part immediately in the labours of the Senate. Some months before attaining his majority, when the wish of travelling predominated, after having informed his mother of a thousand arrangements, all equally affectionate, wise, and generous, that he was about to take for her during his absence, he

wrote, that he proposed visiting Persia, India, and other countries.

"If I do not travel now," said he, "I never shall, and all men should, one day or other. I have, at present, no connections to keep me at home; no wife, or unprovided sisters, brothers, &c. I shall take care of you, and when I return I may possibly become a politician. A few years' knowledge of other countries than our own will not incapacitate me for that part. If we see no nation but our own, we do not give mankind a fair chance: it is from experience, not books, we ought to judge of them. There is nothing like inspection and trusting to our senses."

But while cherishing these ideas, his mind at the same time wavered between the two projects,—Parliament attracted him greatly. Despite his light words, the love of true and merited glory, of the beautiful and the good, ever inflamed his heart. What he wrote a year or two before, to his counsellor and friend, the Rev. Mr. Beecher, had not ceased to be his programme.* He said to his mother, a short time before his majority, that he thought it indispensable, "as a preparation for the future, to make a speech in the House, as soon as he was admitted." He wrote the same thing still more explicitly to Harness; for he then thought seriously of entering upon politics without delay, and his rights as a hereditary legislator paved the way for it. Nevertheless, being hurt, disappointed, and indignant at his guardian's conduct, and feeling himself isolated, he not only renounced taking any active part in the debates of his colleagues, but, according to Moore,

* See chapter on 'Love of Fame.'

appeared to consider the obligation of being amongst them painful and mortifying. Thus, a few days after entering Parliament, he returned disgusted to the solitude of his abbey, there to meditate on the bitterness of precocious experience, or upon scenes that appeared more vast to his independent spirit, than those which his country presented.

The final decision soon came. He resolved on leaving England and taking a long journey with his friend Hobhouse, on seeking sunshine, experience, and forgetfulness for his wounded soul. It seemed really at that moment as if, through an accumulation of disappointment, injustice and grief, the result of lost illusions (he had already written the epitaph on 'Boatswain'), as if, I say, some germs of misanthropy were beginning to appear. But his bitterness did not reach, or rather, did not change his heart: everything proves this. One of his friends, Lord Faulkland, was killed in a duel about this time; and our misanthrope not only was inconsolable, but, despite the embarrassment of his own affairs, generously assisted the family of the deceased, who had been left in distress. Dallas, who, through his prejudices, personal susceptibilities, and exaggerated opinions, shows so little indulgence to Lord Byron, thus describes however the impression made on him, and his conduct under the circumstances:—

"Nature had gifted Lord Byron with most benevolent sentiments, which I had frequent opportunities of perceiving; and I sometimes saw them give to his beautiful countenance an expression truly sublime. I paid him a visit the day after Lord Faulkland's death; he had just seen the lifeless body of

one in whose society he had lately passed a pleasant day. He was saying to himself aloud, from time to time—'Poor Faulkland!' His look was more expressive than his words. 'But,' he added, 'his wife! 'tis she that is to be pitied!' I read his soul full of the kindest intentions, nor were they sterile. If ever there were a pure action, it was the one he meditated then; and the man who conceived and accomplished it was at that moment advancing through thorns and briars towards the free but narrow path that leads to heaven." *

He was setting out then on a long journey. And at that period long journeys were serious things. His first desire was to have a farewell meeting at Newstead, of all his old schoolfellows. And that not sufficing, he even wished to carry their image away with him, so as to enjoy a sensible means of recalling tender remembrances of the past. But his heart found an aliment for misanthropy in the selfish answer given by one of his comrades, who was alarmed at the expense of getting a portrait taken. We see the impression made by this ungenerous reply, in the letter he addressed to his friend Harness:—

"I am going abroad, if possible, in the spring, and before I depart, I am collecting the pictures of my most intimate schoolfellows. I want yours; I have commissioned one of the first miniature painters of the day to take them, of course, at my own expense, as I never allow any to incur the least expenditure to gratify a whim of mine. To mention this may seem indelicate; but when I tell you a

* Dallas, vol. ii.

friend of ours first refused to sit, under the idea that he was to *disburse* on the occasion, you will see that it is *necessary* to state these preliminaries, to prevent the recurrence of any similar mistake. It will be a tax on your patience for a week, but pray excuse it, as it is possible the resemblance may be the sole trace I shall be able to preserve of our past friendship. Just now it seems foolish enough, but in a few years, when some of us are dead, and others are separated by inevitable circumstances, it will be a kind of satisfaction to retain, in these images of the living, the idea of our former selves, and to contemplate, in the resemblances of the dead, all that remains of judgment, feeling, and a host of passions."

If misanthropy had not been an element heterogeneous to his character, it might well have assumed larger proportions at this moment; for, on the very eve of his departure from England, his heart had yet to suffer one of those chilling shocks to which sensitive natures, removed far above the usual temperature of the world, says Moore, are only too much exposed. And this proof of coldness, which he complains of with indignation in a note to the second canto of 'Childe Harold,' was given precisely by one of the friends he most loved. Mr. Dallas, who witnessed the immediate effect produced by this mark of coldness, thus describes it:—

"I found him bursting with indignation. '*Will you believe it?*' said he, 'I *have just* met —— and asked him to come and sit an hour with me; he excused himself; and what do you think was his excuse? He was engaged with his mother and some ladies to go shopping! And he knows I set out

to-morrow to be absent for years, perhaps never to return? Friendship! I do not believe I shall leave behind me, yourself and family excepted, and perhaps my mother, a single being who will care what becomes of me!'"*

The conduct of this friend gave him so much pain, that a year after he wrote again about it, from Constantinople, to Dallas:—

"The only person I counted would feel grieved at my departure took leave of me with such coldness, that if I had not known the heart of man I should have been surprised. I should have attributed it to some offences on my part, had I ever been guilty of aught save *too much affection* for him."

Dallas thought that some lady, from a spirit of vengeance, had excited this young man to slight Lord Byron.

I will not here seek to discover whether he was right or wrong. It suffices that he could believe it, for me to say, that this singular misanthropy, born of heart-deceptions, was in reality nothing else but grief, the causes of which might each be enumerated, but the intensity of which we do not really know, since that deep capacity is the sad privilege of beings highly endowed.

In any case, it is certain that when he left England the measure of disappointments capable of producing real melancholy in such a sensitive heart was quite filled up. Is it, then, surprising that he, like his hero, 'Childe Harold,' should see with indifference the shores of his native land recede? But if, unhappily, the gloomy ideas he welcomed for a

* Moore, vol. i.

moment brought about a regretable habit, no more to be lost, of adopting, in his language spoken and written, expressions and mystifications that too often concealed his real feelings, only letting them be seen through the medium of his mind (a sure way of making him misunderstood), he could not long stand against the proofs of real attachment shown him by his fellow traveller, and, indeed, by all who came near him. Even before setting sail, the influence of this sentiment, combined with his natural disposition to gaiety, became visible; all annoyances seemed forgotten in the agreeable sensation of a first voyage that was to bear him away from the country where he had suffered so much, and which would probably show him, in other lands, more favourable specimens of the human race. Indeed, this is quite evident in the letters and gay verses sent off from Falmouth to his friends Drury and Hodgson, as well as in the more serious strain, though still gay and affectionate, in which he, at the same time, addressed his mother.*

Hardly had he landed at Lisbon, when his heart, yearning after the beautiful, expanded into admiration at sight of the Tagus and the beauties of Cintra; displaying alike his high moral sense of things, whether he expressed admiration or inflicted blame.†

We see his whole nature revolt at baseness, ingratitude, cowardice, ferocity, all kinds of moral deformity; just as much as it was attracted and delighted by patriotism, courage, devotion, sacrifice, love carried to heroism, grace, and beauty. We perceive, in the poet's

* See Moore, 35th and 36th letters. † See 'Childe Harold.'

soul, a freshness and a moral vigour, that shine all the more brightly, contrasted with the misanthropical melancholy of the hero of his legend. But this personage had been imprudently chosen to typify a state of mind into which youth often falls, and which, perhaps, Lord Byron himself went through during a few short hours of disenchantment. The impressions thus gathered, were treasured in his memory until they came to maturity some months later; then they issued from his pen in flowing numbers, whose magic power he then ignored: but assuredly the fine sentiments expressed came from the soul of the minstrel, not from the satiated feelingless hero, who was incapable of experiencing them. Let people only make the distinction between the two personages whom malice has taken pleasure in confounding, an error willingly adopted by a certain set and imposed on credulous minds.*

The relation between the two is not one of family or race, but a purely accidental external resemblance; the result of some strange fancy and intellectual want in the poet, whose powerful imagination, while having recourse only to his own spontaneity for the creation of ideal beings and types, yet required to rest always on reality, for painting the material world and for embodying his metaphysical conceptions.

Thus these two personages leave the same shore, on the same vessel, to make the same voyage, and meet with the same adventures. Both have the same family relations,—a mother, a sister; yes, but their souls are not in the same state, because not of the same nature. That results clearly from a

* See Introduction.

simple inspection of the poem, for all who read in good faith; since, out of 191 stanzas that make up the first two cantos of 'Childe Harold,' there are 112 wherein the poet forgets his hero, speaks in his own name, and shows his real soul—a soul full of energy and beauty, becoming enthusiastic at sight of the wonders displayed in creation, of grandeur, virtue, and love.

Moralists of good faith can tell whether a mind that was corrupted, satiated, wearied, could possibly have felt such enthusiasm. In reality, these emotions betokened the future poet, then unknown to the world and to himself. Let us return to the man,—the best justification for the poet. From Lisbon he wrote another letter, full of fun, to his friend Hodgson. Already he found all well; better than in England. Already he declared himself greatly amused with his pilgrimage: the sight of the Tagus pleased him, Cintra delighted him; he talked Latin at the convent, fed on oranges, embraced everybody, asked news of everybody and everything; "and we find him," says Moore, "in this charming, gay, sportive, schoolboy humour, just at the very moment that 'Childe Harold' is about to reveal to the world his misanthropy, disgust, and insensibility. Lord Byron went from Lisbon to Seville, going seventy miles a day on horseback in the heat of a Spanish July, always delighted, complaining of nothing (in a country where all was wanting), and he arrived in perfect health. There, in that beautiful city of serenades and love-making courtships, his handsome face and person immediately attracted the attention of the fair sex. He was not insensible to the lively

demonstrations of two sisters, and especially of the beauteous Doña Josefa, who declared, with naïve Spanish frankness, how much she liked him. This young girl, and her sister, who was equally charming, made him all kinds of offers, saying, when he left:—"Adieu, handsome creature, I like thee much;" and Josefa asked to have, at least, a lock of his beautiful hair. On arriving at Cadiz, the lovely daughter of an admiral of high birth, with whom he was thrown in contact, could not hide from her parents or himself her partiality for him. She wished to teach him Spanish, never thought he could be near enough to her at the theatre, called him to her side in crowds, made him accompany her home, invited him to return to Cadiz, and, in short, Moore says:—

"Knowing the beauties of Cadiz, his imagination, dazzled by the attractions of several, was on the point of being held captive by one."

He escaped this danger from being obliged to set out for Gibraltar, where he also met with many attentions from persons of rank among his countrymen; but he encountered another peril at the island of Calypso (Malta). For he met there a real Calypso,—a young woman of extraordinary beauty (the daughter and the wife of an ambassador), and no less remarkable for her qualities of mind than for her singular position. All his time at Malta was passed between studying a language and the society of this goddess. And the true account of the attraction with which he inspired this beautiful heroine, and which he amply returned, is not certainly to be found in the stanzas of 'Childe Harold,'

but in the verses addressed from the monastery of Zitza to the beautiful Florence, who had carried off at the same time (says he) both the ring he had refused to the Seville beauty and likewise his heart. On arriving in Albania (ancient Epirus), he went to visit Ali Pasha at Tepeleni, his country seat; and the sight of this beautiful, amiable young man so softened the heart of the ferocious old Moslem, that he wished to be considered as Lord Byron's father, treated him like a son, caused his palaces to be opened to him, surrounding him with the most delicate attentions, sending him fresh drinks and all the delicacies of an Oriental table; he also ordered the Albanian selected to accompany Lord Byron to defend him if requisite at the peril of his life. This Albanian, named Basilius, would not leave Lord Byron afterwards. Wherever any English residents, consuls, or ambassadors could be found, Lord Byron was the object of a thousand attentions and kindnesses. At Constantinople, the English ambassador, Adair, wished him to lodge at his palace; Mr. S—— proposed the same thing at Patras. When he fell ill, he was taken care of, most affectionately even, by the Albanese. All the sympathies enlisted during his travels (and those who knew him thought them most natural) must certainly have acted on his loving, grateful heart, banishing misanthropy if he had experienced it. But did it really exist? Must not even his peace of conscience have counterbalanced bitter remembrances?

His conscience was unburdened, for the griefs he had had were not merited by him. If a young girl had deceived him, he on his side had deceived

no one; if a guardian had neglected and failed in duties towards him, he had always behaved respectfully towards this bad guardian. If hard-hearted critics had insulted, and tried to stifle his budding genius, modest and timid withal, he had already taken his revenge, sure to repent some day of the harshness and injustice which passion had, perhaps, led him into; if his affairs were embarrassed, they had come to him thus by inheritance. If he had taken a share in some youthful dissipation, disgust had quickly followed; not a tear or a seduction had he wherewith to reproach himself. All these testimonies furnished by his conscience, and so consoling in every case, must have been doubly so to a heart like his, which, by his own avowal, could not *go to rest* with the weight of *any remorse* upon it. And, truly, all his correspondence certifies this.

Already at Gibraltar, Lord Byron began writing letters full of clever pleasantry, either to his mother or his friends, and his correspondence always continued in the same tone, with nothing that betrayed melancholy, far less misanthropy like Childe Harold's, although he was composing that poem at this time.

At Malta, it was impossible to find shelter.* His companions grew impatient, but Lord Byron retained his good humour, laughing and joking. On the

* "His lordship was in better spirits when I had met with some adventure, and he chuckled with an inward sense of enjoyment, not altogether without spleen, a kind of malicious satisfaction, as his companions recounted, with all becoming gravity, their woes and sufferings as an apology for begging a bed and a morsel for the night. God forgive! but I partook of Byron's levity at the idea of personages so consequential wandering destitute in the streets, seeking for lodgings from door to door, and rejected at all. Next day, however, they were accommodated by the Governor with an agreeable house," &c.—GALT, p. 66.

mountains of Epirus, which were infested by brigands, the Albanian escort, given him by Ali Pasha, lost their way in the middle of the night, and were surprised by a terrific storm. For nine hours he advanced on horseback under torrents of rain; and when at last he reached his companions, his gaiety was still the same. Assailed by a frightful tempest while going by sea from Constantinople to Athens, shipwreck seemed impending. Every one was crying out in despair; Lord Byron alone consoled and encouraged the rest, then he wrapped himself up in his Albanian capote, and went to sleep quietly, until his fate should be decided. On visiting a cavern with his friend Hobhouse, they lost their way, their torch went out, and they had no prospect but to remain there, and perish with hunger. Hobhouse was in despair; but Lord Byron kept up his courage with jests, and presence of mind fit to save them, and which did so in effect. Privations, rigour of seasons, sufferings that drew complaints from the least delicate, and from his own servants, had no effect on his good humour.*

All this does not simply show his courage and good natural dispositions, it likewise proves that there was not the making of a misanthrope in him. And besides, his fellow-traveller Hobhouse says so positively, in his account of their journey, when relating why Lord Byron could not accompany him in an excursion to Negropont; for he energetically expresses his regret at being obliged to separate, even for so short a time, from a companion, who, according to him, *united to perspicacity of wit and originality of*

* See chapter on 'Courage, Coolness, and Self-control.'

observation, that gay and lively temper which keeps attention awake under the pressure of fatigue, softening every difficulty and every danger."

Truly it might be said that Lord Byron was superior to the weaknesses of humanity. He was evidently patient and amiable in the highest degree. Greece appeared to him delightful,—an enchanting country with a cloudless sky. He liked Athens so much that, on quitting it for the first time, he was obliged to set off at a gallop to have courage enough to go. And when he returned there, though from the cloister of the Franciscan monastery, where he had fixed his abode, he could no longer even perceive the pretty heads of the three Graces *entre les plantes embaumées de la cour*; he felt himself just as happy, because he devoted his time to study, and mixed with persons of note—such as the celebrated Lady Hester Stanhope, Lord Sligo, and Bruce: souvenirs which he has consecrated in his memoirs, saying Lady Hester's (?) was the most delightful acquaintance he had made in Greece.*

He saw Greeks, Turks, Italians, French, and Germans, and was delighted. Now could he observe the character of persons of all nations, and he became more than ever persuaded that travelling is necessary to complete a man's education; he was happy at being able to verify the superiority of his own country, and to increase his knowledge by finding the contrary. He was never either disappointed or disgusted. He lived with both great and small; passing days in the palaces of pashas, and nights in cow-stables with shepherds; always temperate, he never enjoyed better health. "Truly," said he, "I have no cause to com-

* Moore, vol. i.

plain of my destiny." At Constantinople he found the inhabitants good and peaceable; the Turks appeared superior to the Greeks, the Greeks to the Spaniards, and the Spaniards to the Portuguese. It was the man wearied of all, the misanthrope, who wrote all this to his mother, concluding thus:—"I have gone through a great deal of fatigue, but have *not felt wearied for one instant!*"

All the letters addressed to his friends Drury and Hodgson, from Greece or Turkey, were equally devoid of misanthropy, and, indeed, generally full of jokes. It was only when too long a silence on their part awakened painful remembrances, causing a sort of nostalgia of friendship, that a cry of pain once escaped him in these words:—"Truly, I have no friends in the world!" But one feels that he did not believe it, and only spoke as coquettish women do, knowing they are beloved, and willing to hear the old tale repeated.

Again, it was this same man of worn-out feeling, who, despite the embarrassed state of his affairs, showed such unexampled generosity to his mother, and to friends requiring aid both in England and Greece; who likewise displayed touching solicitude towards servants left behind him at home, or even sent away so as not to over-fatigue their youth or their old age; and, finally, who, on learning that one of his dependents was about to commit a bad action, abandoning a young girl whom he had seduced, wrote to his mother:—

"My opinion is that B—— ought to marry Miss N——; our first duty is not to do evil, our second to repair it. I will have no seducers on my estates, and

will not grant my dependents a privilege I would not take myself: namely, of leading astray our neighbours' daughters.

"I hope this Lothario will follow my example, and begin by restoring the girl to society, or by my father's beard he shall hear of me."

And then he also recommends a young servant to her :—

"I pray you to show kindness to Robert, who must miss his master; poor boy! he would scarcely go back."

This letter alone shows a freshness of feeling quite consolatory; certainly 'Childe Harold' was not capable of it.

But despite all these proofs of his good humour, gaiety, and antimisanthropical dispositions, we could cite persons who, even at this period, thought him melancholy. Mr. Galt, for instance, whom chance had brought in contact with him, having met on the same vessel going from Gibraltar to Greece; and then the British Ambassador at Constantinople, Mr. Adair, and even Mr. Bruce, at Athens. How then shall we reconcile these opposite testimonies? It may be done by analysing his fits of melancholy, observing the time and places of their manifestation.

I have said that Lord Byron's melancholy had always real or probable causes (only capable of aggravation from his extremely sensitive temperament), and it has been seen that superabundant causes existed when he left England. That during the whole period of his absence, they may, from time to time, have cast some shade over him, notwithstanding his natural gaiety and his strength of mind, is at

least very probable. But did Mr. Galt, Mr. Adair, and Mr. Bruce, really witness the return of these impressions? or would it not be more natural to believe, since that better agrees with the observations made by those living constantly with him, that, through some resemblance of symptoms, they may have taken for melancholy another psychological phenomenon generally remarked—namely, *the necessity of solitude*, experienced by a high meditative and poetic nature like his? Indeed, what does Galt, say?—

"When night arrived and there were lights in the vessel, he held himself aloof, took his station on the rail, between the pegs on which the sheets are belayed and the shrouds, and there, for hours, sat in silence, enamoured, as people say, of the moon. He was often strangely absent—it may have been from his genius; and, had its sombre grandeur been then known this conduct might have been explained; but, at the time, it threw as it were, around him the sackcloth of penitence. Sitting amidst the shrouds and rattlings, in the tranquillity of the moonlight, composing melodies scarcely formed in his mind, he seemed almost an apparition, suggesting dim reminiscences of him who shot the albatros. He was as a mystery in a winding-sheet crowned with a halo.

"The influence of the incomprehensible phantasma which hovered about Lord Byron has been more or less felt by all who ever approached him. That he sometimes descended from the clouds, and was familiar and earthly, is true; but his dwelling was amidst the murk and the mist, and the home of his spirit in the abyss of the storm and the hiding-places of guilt.

He was at the time of which I am speaking scarcely two-and-twenty, and could claim no higher praise than having written a clever satire; and yet it was impossible, even then, to reflect on the bias of his mind, as it was revealed by the casualties of conversation, without experiencing a presentiment, that he was destined to execute extraordinary things. The description he has given of 'Manfred' in his youth, was of himself:—

> 'My spirit walk'd not with the souls of men,
> Nor look'd upon the earth with human eyes;
> The thirst of their ambition was not mine,
> The aim of their existence was not mine;
> My joys, my griefs, my passions, and my powers,
> Made me a stranger.'"

All that is very well, but the only astonishing part is Mr. Galt's astonishment. The incomprehensible phantom of melancholy and caprice then hanging over Lord Byron, was especially his genius seeking an outlet; it was the melancholy that lays hold of so many great minds, because, having a vision of beauty and fame before their eyes, they fear not attaining to it. That it was which one day led Petrarch, all tearful, to his consoler John of Florence. If almost all great geniuses, ere carving out their path, have experienced this fever of the soul, falling into certain kinds of melancholy, that put on all sorts of forms, —sometimes noisy, sometimes capricious, sometimes misanthropical, was there not greater reason for Lord Byron to undergo such a crisis—at a period when energy of heart and mind was not yet balanced by confidence in his own genius? For he had not met with a John of Florence; he had been so much hurt at the cruel reception given to his first attempts,

that it appeared to him he ought to seek another direction for the employment of his energetic faculties, and turn to active life, as many of his tastes invited. But his genius, unknown to the world as to himself, was, however, fermenting within his brain, feeding on dreams; now pacing a deck, now beneath a starry sky, anon by moonlight, and causing him to absorb from everything all homogeneous to his nature; and thus 'Childe Harold' came to light. When Lord Byron took his pen, the mechanical part of the work alone remained to be done. The elaboration and meditation of it had taken place almost unknown to himself, so that his conceptions remained latent, and took their shape by degrees in his brain, before being fixed in his writings. He penned 'Childe Harold' at Janina and Athens; but it was on the vessel's deck, in that dreamy attitude just seen by Mr. Galt, that he had moulded the clay of his first statue, and given it an immortal form. Could he have done so, if he had always remained in society on deck, laughing, joking, giving way to all his charming, witty bursts of gaiety, as he did while coasting the shores of Sicily, when, from time to time, his playful nature enabled him not only to forget the wounds of his heart, and the disagreeable remembrances left behind, but also to impose silence on the severe requirements of his genius?

The same causes must have produced the same opinions from the British ambassador at Constantinople. Without even speaking of the irksomeness of etiquette, always so distasteful to Lord Byron, that Moore looks upon it as one of the causes of the apparent sadness remarked by Adair, we ought

to remember that he left Constantinople on board the same frigate as the ambassador, making a sea-voyage of four days with him. During these four days, it is likely that Lord Byron did not deny himself solitude, and that he also courted the secret influences exercised by starry nights on the Bosphorus, as he had done under similar circumstances on the Ægean sea. But he had yet another motive for sadness during this passage, since he was then about to separate from his friend and fellow-traveller, Hobhouse, who was obliged to go back to England. Thus, for the first time, Lord Byron would soon find himself alone in a foreign land. The effect produced by this situation must have shown itself in his countenance; for he was experiencing beforehand quite a new sensation, wherein any satisfaction at perfect independence and solitude must have been more than counterbalanced in his feeling, grateful, and in reality most sociable nature, by real grief at such a separation. And I doubt not that when setting foot on the barren Isle of Chios, with its jutting rocks and tall rugged-looking mountains, just after having bade Hobhouse adieu, I doubt not that his heart experienced one of those burning suffocating feelings that belong equally to intense sorrow and joy. When, then, a few days later, he wrote to his mother for the evident purpose of calming the uneasiness she must have felt at knowing him to be alone, and when he mentioned with indifference the departure of his friend, he was exaggerating, except in what he said of loving solitude. That he did not even sufficiently express, for he might have boldly declared that it was positively requisite to him; and,

indeed, his resignation at loss of a friend so thoroughly appreciated is the best proof we could have of it.

In the workings of Lord Byron's intellect, observation, reflection, and solitary meditation were brought into play much more than imagination.* Everything with him took its source from facts; and the vital flame that circulates in every phase of his writings, is the very essence of this reality, first elaborated in his brain and then stamped on his verse. As long as this first kind of work of observation was going on, as long as he was only occupied in imbibing truths of the visible world that were sure to strike him, and storing them in his memory, society, and especially intellectual society, suited him. But when he began to shape his observations into form, by dint of reflection and meditation, generalising and making deductions, then constant society forced upon him fatigued him, and solitude became indispensable. Now it was more particularly at the period of which we are speaking that his mind was in the situation described. He had just visited Albania, whose inhabitants were a violent, turbulent race, animated with a passionate love of independence, who were ever rising in rebellion against authority, and whose every sentiment, passion, and principle, formed a perfect contrast with all existing in his own country. He had become familiar with their usages, and recognised in them the possession of virtues which he loved, though mixed up with vices which he abhorred. He had gone through strange emotions and adventures amongst them; his life had often been in danger from

* Galt says that what he relates of his visit to Ali Pasha has all the *freshness and life of a scene going on under one's own eye.*

the elements, from pirates and brigands; on the throne sat a prince who united monstrous vices to a few virtues, who, wearing gentleness on his countenance, was yet so ferocious in soul, that Byron, despite the favours lavished on himself, felt constrained to paint the tyrant in his real colours. He found in these contrasts, in this moral phenomenon, that which made him shudder, and precisely because it did cause shuddering, the source of soul-stirring, most original poetry, the type of his Eastern verses —of 'Conrad,' 'The Giaour,' and 'Lara'— which, having been admitted into the fertile soil of his brain, were one day to come forth in all their terrible truth, though softened down by some of his own personal qualities; and having gone through, unknown to him, a long process of warm fertilisation, while nursed in *solitary* reflection. Thus solitude was necessary to him; and this want, I again repeat, was an intellectual one, and had nothing to do with melancholy. From Chios Lord Byron went to Athens, a residence so sad and monotonous at this period, that it was well calculated to give rather than cure the spleen. But as he had no malady of this kind, after an excursion into the Morea with Lord Sligo, —a college friend and companion to whom nothing could be refused,—he returned to Athens; and here, in order to enjoy his cherished independence, would not even give himself the distraction of seeing those lovely young faces he used to admire behind the geraniums at their windows, and which had charmed him some months before he took up his abode at the Franciscan convent. There, amid the silence of the cloister, he could commune freely with his own

mind, allow it full expansion, and revert, at will, from solitary contemplation to the most varied studies, especially to that he always so much appreciated—the study of mankind in general.

"Here," he wrote to his mother, "I see and have conversed with French, Italians, Germans, Danes, Greeks, Turks, Americans, &c.; and, without losing sight of my own, I can judge of the countries and manners of others. When I see the superiority of England (which, by-the-bye, we are a great deal mistaken about in many things) I am pleased, and where I find her inferior, I am at least enlightened. Now, I might have stayed, smoked in your towns, or fogged in your country a century without being sure of this, and without acquiring anything more useful or amusing at home."

And then he adds:—

"I hope, on my return, to lead a quiet, recluse life; but God knows and does best for us all; at least so they say, and I have nothing to object, as, on the whole, I have no reason to complain of my lot. I trust this will find you well, and as happy as one can be; you will, at least, be pleased to hear I am so."

It was in this admirable frame of mind that he often went from Athens to Cape Colonna. And amid these ruins, washed by the blue waves of the Ægean Sea, immortalised by Plato, who here taught his half-Christian philosophy, Lord Byron took his seat at the celestial banquet spread by the great master, and entered into full possession of his genius. For, although he ignored its great power and extent, it is impossible that he should not have had, in hours like these, some vision of the future, some

presentiment of coming glory, which, piercing through the veils that yet shrouded his genius, gave moments of ineffable delight. When he bathed in some solitary spot, he tells us in his Memoranda that one of his greatest delights was to sit on a rock overlooking the waves, and to remain there whole hours lost in admiration of sky and sea, "absorbed," says Moore, "in that sort of vague reverie, which, however formless and indistinct at the moment, settled afterwards on his pages into those clear, bright pictures which will endure for ever."

One day, while he was swimming under the rocks of Cape Colonna, a vessel from the coast of Attica drew near. On board, going from London to Athens, were two celebrated personages — Lady Hester Stanhope and Mr. Bruce. The first object that greeted their eyes, on nearing Sanium, was Lord Byron, playing all alone with his favourite element. Some days after, his friend Lord Sligo wished him to make their acquaintance, and he saw a great deal of them at Athens. In his Memoranda the following words are applied to them:— "It was the commencement (their meeting at Cape Colonna) of the most delightful acquaintance I have made in Greece." And he wished to assure Mr. Bruce, in case these lines should ever fall under his notice, of the pleasure he experienced in recalling the time they had passed together at Athens. Now I do not see any symptom of melancholy in all this, nor in all preceding, and yet Bruce thought there was. Did he, then, also consider the joy Lord Byron felt in solitude, and his indifference for the false conventional enthusiasm his countrymen

affected to display at sight of the ruins of Greece, as so many other tokens of melancholy? In reality Lord Byron was averse to all kinds of affectation, made no exception in favour of the artistic pretensions which constitute the hypocrisy of taste, and only gave the sincere, ardent homage of his soul to those things of antiquity that recall great names or great actions, and to sublime scenes in nature. Notwithstanding his fine intelligence, it is not impossible that Mr. Bruce also may have shared the errors of superficial minds; and it is likewise possible that Lord Byron may really, during the last period of his sojourn at Athens, have sometimes been melancholy, for causes of grief were certainly not wanting. His man of business wished Lord Byron at this time to sell Newstead, so as to get his affairs into some definite order. Perhaps it would have been wise, but such a determination was extremely repugnant to him, for he was very fond of Newstead, and had even written to his mother, before leaving, that she might be quite easy on this head, as he would never part with it. However, his agent, wishing to get him back to England, then affected negligence, would not write, and made him wait for money. Lord Byron grew uneasy and alarmed, was out of humour, and often seemed capricious, because these circumstances obliged him to change his travelling plans, and finally left him no other alternative but to return to England, where, as he wrote to a friend, his first interview would be with a lawyer, the second with a creditor; and then would come discussions with miners, farmers, stewards

and all the disagreeables consequent on a ruined property and disputed mines.

After having resisted all these fears for some time, he was obliged to decide on returning. Behold him, then, on the road to England.

At Malta he had attacks of fever to which his state of mind was certainly not wholly foreign. "We have seen," says Moore, "from the letters written by him on his passage homeward (on board the 'Volage' frigate) how far from cheerful or happy was the state of mind in which he returned. In truth, even for a disposition of the most sanguine cast, there was quite enough in the discomfort that now awaited him in England to sadden its hopes and check its buoyancy."

And yet in these letters, melancholy at bottom, which he addressed to his mother and friends during this tiresome voyage of more than six weeks, we still perceive, overriding all, his kind, sensitive, playful nature. He told them that if one cannot be happy, one must at least try to be a little gay; that if England had ceased to smile on him, there were other skies more serene; that he was coming back shaken by fever morally and physically, but with a firm, intrepid spirit. And, in short, pleasantry never failed him.

Always admirable towards his mother, he spoke of his apathy, but reassured her directly, adding:—

"Dear mother," (he wrote to her on the 'Volage' frigate), "within that apathy I certainly do not comprise yourself, as I will prove by every means in my power.

"P.S.—You will consider Newstead as your house, not mine, and me only as a visitor." *

He had hardly arrived in London when Mr. Dallas hastened to greet him, and instead of finding him changed, thought he was in excellent health, with a countenance that betrayed neither melancholy nor any trace of discontent at his return. The truth is, that those sorrows which did not reach his heart were never very deep with Lord Byron. But already a most formidable tempest was gathering on the horizon of his fate, for it was one that would cruelly wound his heart. Perhaps it was some vague, inexplicable presentiment of what was threatening him that saddened his return to his native country. The storm burst as soon as he set foot in London; for he was summoned in haste to Newstead, his mother's life being declared in danger. He set out instantaneously, but on arriving found only a corpse! This spectacle was still before his eyes; he had hardly quitted the chamber of death, where, in the obscurity of night and alone, believing himself free from all observation, he had given way in silence and darkness to the real sentiments of his heart, weeping bitterly the loss of a mother who had idolized him, when in rapid succession news arrived of the deaths of his dearest friends. Mathews, his mind's idol, had just been drowned in the river Cam, at Cambridge; Wingfield, one of his heart-idols, was dying of fever at Coimbra; his dear Eddlestone was in the last stage of consumption; and, finally, he learned the death of another loved,

* See Moore, Letters 52 and 54, to Mrs. Byron.

mysterious being. Six deaths within a few short weeks!

"If to be able," says Moore, "to depict powerfully the painful emotions it is necessary first to have experienced them, or, in other words, if, for the poet to be great the man must suffer, Lord Byron, it must be owned, paid early this dear price of mastery."

This was certainly a most painful crisis in his existence. What he felt then cannot be called melancholy; it was truly *desolation*, *agony of heart*. Seeing himself alone in his venerable but gloomy abode, beside the dead body of his mother, solitude was for the first time intolerable to him, and, despite his strength of mind, he experienced moments of weakness. In his agony he wrote a letter to his friend Scrope Davies that is truly painful to read, so much does it bear the impress of intense suffering.

"Some curse hangs over me and mine," says he. "My mother lies a corpse in this house; one of my best friends is drowned in a ditch. What can I say, or think, or do?

"My dear Davis, if you can spare a moment, do come down to me; I want a friend. Come to me, Scrope, I am almost desolate, left almost alone in the world. I must enjoy the survivors whilst I can. Write or come, but come if you can, or one or both."

Hardly had he allowed himself this heartrending expression of grief, most touching for those who knew his repugnance to showing any sensibility of heart, when a new calamity overtook him. His dear friend, Wingfield, died at Coimbra at the age of twenty-one. Thoughts of death even took possession

of Lord Byron's soul, influencing and directing all his actions. Neither self-love, nor the hope of great success with 'Childe Harold,' which had been announced to him as he passed through London, any longer could charm; tears dimmed the lustre of fame; he could only occupy himself with the fate of the surviving, and resolved on making his will in case of his own death. We find him then at this time solely engaged in making out this new deed. He destroyed the old will, rendered useless by the death of his mother, and took care to forget no one in the new one; all his servants were mentioned with admirable solicitude; and, in short, his last testament fully displayed the beautiful, generous soul that had dictated it.

Some weeks after, he wrote to Dallas:—

"At three-and-twenty I am left alone, and what more can we be at seventy? It is true that I am young to begin again, but with whom can I retrace the laughing part of life?"

"Indeed," writes he, at the same time to Hodgson, "the blows followed each other so rapidly, that I am yet stupid from the shock; and though I do eat, and drink, and talk, and even laugh at times, yet I can hardly persuade myself that I am awake, did not every morning convince me mournfully to the contrary.

"Davies has been here; his gaiety (death cannot mar it) has done me service; but, after all, ours was a hollow laughter! You will write to me? I am solitary, and I never felt solitude irksome before."

His moral sufferings had never been so great; and

what he said and experienced under these circumstances, amply prove that solitude was good for him, when not unhappy. "I can do nothing," writes he to Dallas, "and my days pass, except for a few bodily exercises, in uniform indolence and idle insipidity."

The task of publishing 'Childe Harold' was left to Dallas, and the certainty of its success found him pretty nearly indifferent. When his heart was in pain, Lord Byron's self-love always lay dormant. But destiny was still far from granting him any respite. Eddlestone, that dear friend, on whose true affection he most relied, as well as another beloved one, whose name ever remained locked within his breast, both died about this time; so that, as he says in his preface, during the short space of two months, he lost six persons most dear. In announcing this new misfortune to Dallas, he expresses himself in the following words:—

"I have almost forgot the taste of grief; *and supped full of horrors*, till I have become callous; nor have I a tear left for an event which, five years ago, would have bowed down my head to the earth. It seems to me as though I were to experience in my youth the greatest misery of age. My friends fall around me, and I shall be left a lonely tree before I am withered.

"Other men can always take refuge in their families; I have no resource but my own reflections, and they present no prospect here or hereafter, except the selfish satisfaction of surviving my betters. I am, indeed, very wretched, and you will excuse my saying so, as you know I am not apt to cant of sensibility."

But if tears no longer flowed from his eyes, they did from his pen; for it was then he wrote his elegies to 'Thyrza,' whose pathetic sublimity is so well characterized by Moore; and that he added those melancholy stanzas in 'Childe Harold' on the death of friends, which we find at the end of the second canto.

"Indeed," he wrote again to Hodgson, "I am growing nervous, ridiculously nervous, I can neither read, write, nor amuse myself, or any one else. My days are listless, and my nights restless. I have very seldom any society, and when I have, I run out of it. At this present writing, there are in the next room three ladies, and I have stolen away to write this grumbling letter. I don't know that I sha'n't end with insanity, for I find a want of method in arranging my thoughts that perplexes me strangely; but this looks more like silliness than madness, as Scrope Davies would facetiously remark in his consoling manner. I must try the hartshorn of your company; and a session of Parliament would suit me well, anything to cure me of conjugating the accursed verb *ennuyer*."

Distractions did come to him, but of a kind to make him conjugate verbs equally disagreeable; for they came caused by grief and irritation. In an infamous, ignoble publication, called 'The Scourge,' an anonymous author, probably making himself the organ of those who wished to avenge Lord Byron's satires, attacked his birth, and the reputation of his mother, who, despite her faults, was a very respectable, excellent woman.

"During the first winters after Lord Byron had

returned to England," says Mr. Galt, "I was frequently with him. At that time, the strongest feeling by which he appeared to be actuated was indignation against a writer in a scurrilous publication, called 'The Scourge,' in which he was not only treated with unjustifiable malignity, but charged with being, as he told me himself, the illegitimate son of a murderer. I had not read the work; but the writer who could make such an absurd accusation, must have been strangely ignorant of the very circumstances from which he derived the materials of his own libel. When Lord Byron mentioned the subject to me, and that he was consulting Sir Vicary Gibbs with the intention of prosecuting the publisher and the author, I advised him, as well as I could, to desist, simply because the allegations referred to well known occurrences. His grand-uncle's duel with Mr. Chaworth, and the order of the House of Peers to produce evidence of his grandfather's marriage with Miss Trevannion, the facts of which being matter of history and public record, superseded the necessity of any proceeding.

"Knowing how deeply this affair agitated him at that time, I was not surprised at the sequestration in which he held himself, and which made those who were not acquainted with his shy and mystical nature apply to him the description of his own 'Lara.'" *

Lord Byron's conduct at this period, led those who did not know his timid mystery-loving nature, to fancy that they recognized him in the portrait drawn of 'Lara.' Probably they were unaware how his

* Galt, p. 105.

hard fate was now not sparing him one single grief or mortification; how he was struggling between the necessity of putting up Newstead for sale and the extreme repugnance he felt to such a step.

"Before his resolve was taken on this head," says Mr. Galt, "he was often so troubled in mind, as to be unable to hide his sadness; and he often spoke of leaving England for ever."

Already, long absence had made him lose sight of several early comrades; his mother was dead, and he scarcely saw his sister, who lived in quite another circle; through his antecedents, his youth, and his travels abroad, he was still a stranger among his fellow peers; the only persons he saw much of were five or six college friends, whom death had spared, and to whom he was extremely attached; but they were his sole affections. His ideal standard of perfection which, being brought in contact with reality, had always a little spoilt women for him, had ended by making them almost disagreeable.

"I have one request to make," wrote he at this time to H——, "never again speak to me in your letters of a woman; do not even allude to the existence of the sex. I will not so much as read a word about them; it must be *propria que maribus*."

It was in this state of relative isolation that he came to London, about the end of the year, and found Dallas preparing to have 'Childe Harold' published; a task in which Lord Byron half unwillingly joined.

"He seemed more inclined," says Dallas, "at that time to seek more solid fame, by endeavouring to become an active, eloquent statesman."

But, notwithstanding this perspective, despite his genius and his youth, Lord Byron often fell into a sort of mental prostration, which was, says Dallas again, "rather the *result of his particular situation, feeling himself out of his sphere, than that of a gloomy disposition* received from nature."

We have seen, in effect, that there were circumstances then existing well calculated to darken his noble brow, and give him those nervous movements that may have seemed like caprice to those who were ignorant of their cause; and I wished to enter into these details so as to characterize well the epoch when his melancholy was greatest, and to show that it had its chief source in the anguish of his heart. It was to this time he alluded, when, in other days of suffering (at the period of his separation from Lady Byron), wherein his heart had smaller share, he wrote to Moore:—"If my heart could have broken, it would have done so years ago, through events more afflicting than this."

I also wished to enter into these details, because, desiring to prove that Lord Byron's melancholy almost always arose from palpable causes, it was necessary to make these causes known; and thus those who have declared his griefs to be rather *imaginary* than *real*, may find in this chapter abundant reason for rectifying their ideas. Among the number of such persons we may rank Mr. Macaulay, the eloquent historian, whose opinion, however, has *no weight*, as regards Lord Byron's character. For it is evident that he made use of this great name by way of choosing a good theme for his eloquence, a sort

of mould for fine phrases. Besides, Macaulay did not know Lord Byron personally, nor did he study him impartially; facts which are his *fault* and his *excuse*.

After having paid this great tribute to grief during six months, the storm appeared to subside; and a ray of sunshine penetrated into Lord Byron's mind. It was then that he made Moore's acquaintance, and that of other clever men, among whom we may cite Rogers and Campbell. Moore especially, introduced under circumstances that brought out strongly the most amiable and estimable qualities of heart and mind, was to Lord Byron as a beacon-light amid the clouds external and internal harassing him then; and their sympathy was mutual and instantaneous. Lord Byron wrote directly to Harness :—

"Moore is the epitome of everything exquisite in poetic and personal perfections."

On his side, Moore, after having praised the *manly, generous, pleasing refinement of his new friend*, sums up by saying :—"*Frank and manly as I found his nature then, so did I ever find it to his latest hour.*" And in describing the effect produced on him by his first meeting with Lord Byron, he says :—

"*Among the impressions which this meeting left upon me, what I chiefly remember to have remarked was the nobleness of his air, his beauty, the gentleness of his voice and manners.* Being in mourning for his mother, the colour, as well of his dress as of his glossy, curling, and picturesque hair, gave more effect to the pure, spiritual paleness of his features, in the expression of which, when he spoke, there was a perpetual play

of lively thought, though melancholy was their habitual character when in repose."

But this melancholy, having become habitual to him through accident, began then to disperse, as snow melts beneath the soft and warm breath of spring. The first symptom was that he judged better of himself; for, writing to his friend Harness, to express his general opinion on human selfishness, he said, "But I do not think we are born of this disposition."

"From the time of our first meeting," says Moore, "there seldom elapsed a day that Lord Byron and I did not see each other, and our acquaintance ripened into intimacy and friendship with a rapidity of which I have seldom known an example." *

Moore's company was a great consolation to him then, and Providence willed that the first balsam applied to his wounds, after that of time, should come from the hand of one whom he had lashed in his satire. He passed in this way the last months of 1811, and the first two of the following year. Meanwhile his star was about to rise, soon to transform, without any transition, his misty sky into brightest light, too dazzling, alas! to endure. For the sun, when it shines so radiantly in early morning, absorbs too many bad vapours. But we will not anticipate events which I am not relating here.

The parliamentary session being opened, Lord Byron resumed his seat in the upper House. But he was only known there by the satire that had raised him up such a host of enemies; otherwise, the hand-

* Moore, Letter 81.

some young man who had come amongst them three years before, but who had since appeared to disdain their labours, preferring foreign travel in Spain and the East, was scarcely remembered. When they saw him return, still so young and handsome, but with a grave melancholy brow, and that he immediately distinguished himself as an orator, general admiration was excited. Even those he had offended generously forgot their anger in sympathy for a fellow-countryman, and pride in such a colleague; pride and enthusiasm were so general that both parties, Tories and Whigs, shared it equally. Lord Holland told him that *as an orator he would beat them all, if he persevered.* Lord Grenville remarked that for the construction of his phrases *he already resembled Burke.* Sir Francis Burdett declared that his discourse was the *best* pronounced by a lord in parliamentary memory. Several other noblemen asked to be presented, and even those he had offended came round to shake hands. Generous natures showed themselves on this occasion. The success of the orator heralded that of the poet, for 'Childe Harold' appeared a few days after.

"The effect was," said Moore, "accordingly electric; his fame had not to wait for any of the ordinary gradations, but seemed to spring up like the palace of a fairy tale, in a night. As he himself briefly described it in his memoranda:—'I awoke one morning, and found myself famous.'

"The first edition of his work was disposed of instantly; and, as the echoes of its reputation multiplied on all sides, 'Childe Harold' and 'Lord Byron'

became the theme of every tongue. At his door most of the leading names of the day presented themselves. From morning till night the most flattering testimonies of his success crowded his table from the grave tributes of the statesman and the philosopher down to (what flattered him still more) the romantic billet of some *incognita*, or the pressing note of invitation from some fair leader of fashion; and, in place of the desert which London had been to him but a few weeks before, he now not only saw the whole splendid interior of high life thrown open to receive him, but found himself among its illustrious crowds the most distinguished object."

I may also mention Dallas, who in speaking of this unexampled success, says :—

"Lord Byron had become the subject of every conversation in town.

"He was surrounded with honours. From the Regent and his admirable daughter, down to the editor and his clerk; from Walter Scott and Jeffrey down to the anonymous authors of the 'Satirist' and the 'Scourge;' all and each extolled his merits. He was the admiration of the old, and the marvel of the fashionable circles of which he had become the idol."

This adoration of a whole nation did not turn his head; but it touched and rejoiced his heart. When he knew himself forgiven and loved by those even whom he had most offended in his satire, towards whom he felt most guilty, as, for instance, the excellent Lord Holland, who asked for his friendship, predicting his future fame as an orator, and already placing him beside Walter Scott as a poet; then by Lord

FitzGerald, who declared himself incapable of feeling angry with 'Childe Harold,' and many, many others; when all this occurred, Lord Byron's heart expanded to the better feelings he had long kept under control and hidden. He gave way to his innate kindness, to generous forgiveness; his own good qualities were stimulated by the kindness and generosity of others; this, rather than any satisfaction of self-love, dispelled the clouds from his soul, changed the sky and atmosphere, and his melancholy of that period, which owed its source to the heart, became neutralised by the heartfelt satisfaction he experienced. His letters, and particularly those to Moore, are full of life and animation at this time; and such as he appeared in his letters, such did Moore describe him in his habitual frame of mind. Dallas, who before had so often seen him melancholy, says :—

"I am happy to think that the success with which he has met, and the object of universal attention which he has become, have already produced upon his soul that softening influence which I had expected and foreseen; and I trust, that all his former grief will now have passed for ever."

Galt, himself, despite the effort he seems to make in praising him, cannot help owning that at this period, when everybody was kind to Lord Byron, he, on his side, displayed the utmost gentleness, kindness, amiability, and desire of obliging, combined with habitual gaiety and pleasantry. The general tone of his Memoranda at this time, particularly in 1813, shows him *pleased with everybody and everything.*

After having praised Moore, he speaks highly of Lord Ward, afterwards Lord Dudley :—

"I like Ward," he says, and adds, "by Mahomet! I begin to fear getting to like everybody; a disposition not to be encouraged. It is a sort of social gluttony, that makes one swallow all one comes in contact with. But I do like Ward."

Nevertheless, this serenity, by lasting over the interval that elapsed between his twenty-third and twenty-sixth year, at which period his marriage took place, was traversed by many clouds, more or less evanescent; and he still had hours and days of melancholy. Assuredly, Lord Byron could not avoid those oscillations of heart and mind that belong to the very essence of the human heart. But, at least, it is easy to assign a palpable cause for all the fits of ennui or melancholy experienced at this time. All his tendencies then show indifference, if not dislike, to female society. His ideal of perfection had spoilt him for women, in the first instance, and the unfortunate experience he had of them still further lowered his opinion of them. But if he did not care about them, it was presumptuous to think he could put aside the sex altogether.

By adopting an anchorite's regimen, he strengthened, it is true, the spiritual part of his nature; and certainly seemed to believe his heart would be satisfied with friendship. His acquaintance with Moore, especially, gave to his daily existence the intellectual and spiritual aliment so necessary to him. But, he reckoned on setting woman aside; and his presumptuous heart numbered only twenty-three sum-

mers! Among the letters and tokens of homage that piled his table in those days, figured many rose-coloured notes, written on gilt-edged perfumed paper. Such incense easily ascends, and it was not surprising that his head should also suffer. 'Childe Harold,' of course, acted most on the imagination of women of powerful intellect and ardent nature, and thus his own peril grew afresh, involuntarily evoked by himself. For, if the prestige of position and circumstance adding lustre to genius, could act strongly even upon men, what must have been their combined influence when added to his personal beauty, upon women?—

". . . . These personal influences acted with increased force, from the assistance derived from others, which, to female imaginations especially, would have presented a sufficiency of attraction, even without the great qualities joined with them. His youth, the noble beauty of his countenance, and its constant play of light and shadow—the gentleness of his voice and manner to women, and his occasional haughtiness to men,—the alleged singularities of his mode of life, which kept curiosity constantly alive; all these minor traits concurred towards the quick spread of his fame; nor can it be denied that, among many purer sources of interest in his poem, the allusions which he makes to instances of '*successful* passion' in his career, were not without their influence on the fancies of that sex whose weakness it is to be most easily won by those who come recommended by the greatest number of triumphs over others . . . . Altogether, taking into consideration the various points I have here enumerated,

it may be asserted, that there never before existed, and, it is most probable, there never will exist again, a combination of such vast mental powers and such genius, with so many other of those advantages and attractions by which the world is in general dazzled and captivated."

This rare combination of advantages were so many means of seduction on his side, involuntarily exercised, and the sole ones he would have condescended to employ; meanwhile all advances were spared him on the other. There were fine ladies whom nothing daunted, if only they could find favour in his sight; who forgot for him their rank, their duties, their families, braving the whole world, donning strange costumes to get at him, carrying jealousy to the verge of madness, to attempted suicide, or to the conception, at least, of crime. One distinguished herself by excessive daring; another, who had not been happy in married life, but who had tried to make up for want of affection by securing her husband's friendship and esteem, was now willing to sacrifice all to her wild passion for the youthful peer.

Whatever the sentiment which in his breast responded to all the feelings he excited, it is certain that they possessed, at least, the power of disturbing his tranquillity. They were like so many beautiful plants, all showy and perfumed, yet distilling poison. The woman whose passion he bore with, rather than shared, could not fail to compromise him; they had exchanged parts, so to say, and he had to suffer from that jealousy, which more frequently falls to the lot of woman. The ennui he thus experienced was tinctured with irritation, while the emotions to which the other lady gave rise, were softer, truer, and more

ardent. If we examine well his Memoranda and confidential letters of this time, and confront his expressions with facts, we shall always find therein the cause and palpable explanation of those mysterious though short-lived sadnesses then experienced. We shall find the expression of peace sacrificed, or sadness produced, sometimes couched in language indicative of affection or regret; then, again, in words that betray fear or irritation. For instance, we read in a passage of his Memoranda :—

"I wish I could settle to reading again,—my life is monotonous, and yet desultory. I take up books, and fling them down again. I began a comedy, and burnt it, because the scene ran into reality; a novel, for the same reason. In rhyme, I can keep more away from facts; but the thought always runs through, through. . . . Yes, yes; through."

And we have in these two words the precise explanation of this feeling of *ennui*.

He was at this time contemplating a voyage :—

"Ward talks of going to Holland, and we have partly discussed an expedition together . . . And why not? . . . is far away. . . . No one else, except Augusta (his sister), cares for me—no ties—no trammels—*andiamo dunque*—se torniamo bene—se no che importa?" *

He was evidently sad that day; but, is not the nature of his sadness revealed in those words :—"She is far away—"?

According to his Memoranda, he again fell into this vein of sadness some months later, in February, 1814; but then, also, its causes are very evident.

* 'Jacopo Ortis,' Ugo Foscolo.

An accumulation of painful things, united to overwhelm him. He had sought to satisfy the longings of his heart by extraordinary intellectual activity, writing the 'Bride of Abydos' in four nights, and the 'Corsair' in a few days; he had also fought against them, by endeavouring to make a six months' journey into Holland; but this project failed, from obstacles created by a friend who was to accompany him; and, besides, the plague was then prevalent in the East; he was, moreover, embarrassed with the difficulty of selling Newstead, and the necessity of such a painful measure: all which circumstances united to keep him in England. And a host of other irritating annoyances, the work of irreconcilable enemies, who were jealous of his success and his superiority, then fell upon him, as they could not fail to do; for his sun had risen too brightly not to call forth noxious vapours.

After having passed a month away from London, he wrote in his Memoranda:—

"I see all the papers are in a sad commotion with those eight lines. . . . You have no conception of the ludicrous solemnity with which these two stanzas have been treated . . . of the uproar the lines on the little 'Royalty's Weeping,' in 1812 (now republished) have occasioned. The 'Morning Post' gave notice of an intended motion in the House of my brethren on the subject, and God knows what proceedings besides. . . . This last piece of intelligence is, I presume, too laughable to be true, &c., &c." *

The first blow to his popularity was now given;

* Moore, Letter 166.

and soon the whole nation rose up in arms against him. All jealousies, and all resentments now ranged themselves under one hostile banner, distorting Lord Byron's every word, calumniating his motives, making his most generous and noble actions serve as pretexts for attack; reproaching him with having given up enmities from base reasons (while he had done so in reality from feelings of justice and gratitude), pretending * that he had pocketed large sums for his poems, and rendering him responsible for the follies women chose to commit about him. This war, breaking out against him like an unexpected hurricane amid radiant sunshine, must naturally have caused irritation. And if we add to it the embarassment of his affairs, the deplorable events in his opinion then going on in the world, the fall of the great Napoleon, whom he admired, the invasion of France by the Allied Powers, which he disapproved of, the policy pursued by his country, and the evils endured by humanity—spectacles that always made his heart bleed,—we may well understand how all these causes may have given rise to some moments of misanthropy, such as are betrayed by a few expressions in his journal; but it was a misanthropy that existed only in words, a plant without roots, of ephemeral growth, and most natural to a fine nature. We feel, notwithstanding all these real palpable causes of ennui, that his principal sufferings still came from the heart.

"Lady Melbourne," writes Lord Byron in his Memoranda, in 1814, "tells me that it is said that I am 'much out of spirits.' I wonder if I am really

* Moore, Letter 166.

or not? I have certainly enough of '*that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart*,' *and it is better they should believe it to be the result of these attacks than that they should guess the real cause*."

And this real cause was a grief he wished to keep secret. Separation from friends, their departure, even when he was to meet them again, likewise caused him sadness. Especially was this the case with regard to Moore, whom he loved so much, and whose society had an unspeakable charm for him :— "I can only repeat," he said "that I wish you would either remain a long time with us, or not come at all, for these snatches of society make the subsequent separations bitterer than ever." *

And in the next letter he says :—"I could be very sentimental now, but I won't. The truth is, that I have been all my life trying to harden my heart, and have not yet quite succeeded—though there are great hopes—and you do not know how it sunk with your departure."

This influence is ever visible. The English climate was always distasteful to him, and its fogs displeased him more since he had revelled in the splendour of Eastern suns; moreover, mists grew darker and colder when his imagination was still more influenced by his heart. At those moments his first thought ever was—"*Let me depart, let me seek a bright sun, a blue sky.*" When to his great regret, the East was closed against him by the plague of 1813, in his disdain for northern countries, he exclaimed :—

"Give me a *sun*, I care not how hot, and sherbet, I care not how cool, and my heaven is as easily made

* Moore, Letters 183 and 184.

as your Persian's." Making allusions to this verse—

> "*A Persian's heaven is* easily made,—
> *'Tis but black eyes and lemonade.*"

But we know that he was thinking of this voyage, in order to divert his mind from the regret of having been obliged, from motives of honour and prudence, to give up accompanying into Sicily a family he liked very much. However, the sight of a camel sufficed to carry him back to Asia and the Euxine Sea, and to make him cry out: "*Quando te aspiciam!*"

It was also at this time that he wrote to Moore: "All convulsions with me end in rhyme." To overcome certain agitations of heart, he wrote the 'Bride of Abydos,' and directly afterwards the 'Corsair.'

But if the melancholy, more or less deep, that cast its shadows over this brilliant period of his triumphs, wore specially the above character, it changed somewhat after his marriage. Thenceforward his melancholy sprang less from the heart, than from bitter disenchantment; from the suffering of a proud nature, cruelly wounded in its sentiment of justice by indignities, calumnies, persecutions, unexampled under such circumstances. Having already spoken of this marriage, I shall leave to regular biographers the detailed account of this painful period, so as only to consider it here under the sole aspect of the griefs it caused. I will not even stop to mention the unaccountable melancholy occasioned by a presentiment before marriage, nor the mysterious sort of agony that seized upon him just as he was about to kneel for the nuptial ceremony in church, nor even the sadness brought about by his first experience of the disposi-

tion of the person with whom he had so imprudently linked his fate. I will say, rather, that the melancholy caused and produced by this marriage, was really grief; and of the kind that most harshly tries, not only firmness of soul, but likewise true virtue. For all the baseness, cowardice and spirit of revenge that had lain hidden a moment while his triumphal car passed on, united at this moment to overwhelm and cast him down. And the means employed were instinct with such perversity, that his great moral courage, always so powerful in helping him to bear contradictions, disappointments, and personal misfortunes, were no longer of any assistance, threatened as he was with the greatest calamity that can possibly befall a man of honour—namely, to be misjudged, calumniated, accused, thought capable of deeds quite contrary to his high nature. Neither his courage, firmness, nor even the testimony of conscience could shield him from great unhappiness. And he suffered all the more that the blame incurred proceeded from worthy persons who had been mischievously led into error; nor could he conceal from himself that he had voluntarily contributed to produce this unhappy state of things, by not sufficiently avoiding certain appearances, by not attaching sufficent importance to the opinion of his fellow men, and having lent himself, too easily, to misinterpretation.

"The thorns which I have reaped," said he later (but he thought it much earlier), "are of the tree I planted,—they have torn me,—and I bled; I should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed."*

* 'Childe Harold,' Canto 4th.

In addition to all this, Lord Byron had to experience the effects of a phenomenon of a terrible character, a phenomenon almost peculiar to England, the tyrannical power of its public opinion. This power, that gives form and movement to what is called the great world in England, weighed so heavily on the weak minds of several persons calling themselves friends, that, with few exceptions, and though all the while persuaded of the injustice of such opinion, after a few feeble efforts at changing it, and showing the wrong done to Lord Byron, they lost courage to declare their belief. Not only did they no longer protest, but they even pretended to believe part of the stupid calumnies spread abroad. To a heart firm and devoted as his, which, under similar circumstances, would have fought to the death in defence of outraged justice and a persecuted friend, this was one of the most cruel trials imposed on him by adverse destiny. What he must have suffered at this period has been already spoken of in another chapter. I will only say here, that, despite time, and the philosophy, which, subsequently, restored partial serenity, this wound never quite closed, since, even in the fourteenth canto of 'Don Juan,' written shortly before his last journey into Greece, he still made allusion to it, saying ironically :—

> "Without a friend, what were humanity,
> To hunt our errors up with a good grace?
> Consoling us with—'Would you had thought twice!
> Ah! if you had but followed my advice!'
> O Job! you had but two friends: one 's quite enough,
> Especially when we are ill at ease."

Moore adds :—"Lord Byron could not have said, at

this time, whether it was the attacks of his enemies, or the condolences of his friends that most lacerated his heart."

It was in this state of mind that he quitted England. He visited Belgium, and its battle-plains, still coming across fields of blood; went up the Rhine, and spent some months in Switzerland, where the glaciers, precipices, and the Alps, presented him with a splendid framework for new poems. All the melancholy to be found in 'Childe Harold' (third canto), in 'Manfred,' and in his Memoranda at that time, is evidently caused by grief, either of fresh occurrence or renewed by memory. A smile still sometimes wreathed his lip; but, when the gaiety natural to his age and disposition would fain have taken possession of his heart, the remembrance of all the indignities he had undergone, rose up before him as the words *Mené*, *Tekel*, *Upharsin*, did to Balthasar. And often his fit of gaiety ended in a sigh, which even became habitual after it had ceased to express sorrow. All those who knew Lord Byron have remarked *this singular and touching sigh*, attributing it to a melancholy temperament. But it was especially produced by a crowd of painful indistinct remembrances, intruding upon him at some moment when he would and could have been happy. So he has told us in those exquisite lines of his fourth canto of 'Childe Harold;' and he often repeated the same in prose. Thus, for instance, at the time of his excursions to Mont Blanc and the Glaciers, which, had his heart been lighter, would have made him so happy, he finished his Memoranda with these melancholy words:—

"In the weather for this tour (of thirteen days) I

have been very fortunate—fortunate in a companion (Hobhouse), fortunate in our prospects, and exempt from even the little petty accidents and delays which often render journeys in a less wild country disappointing. I was disposed to be pleased. I am a lover of nature, and an admirer of beauty. I can bear fatigue, and welcome privation, and have seen some of the noblest views in the world. But, in all this, the recollection of bitterness, and more especially of recent and, more, home desolation—which must accompany me through life—have preyed upon me here; and neither the music of the shepherd, the crashing of the avalanche, nor the torrent, the mountain, the glacier, the forest, nor the cloud, have for one moment lightened the weight upon my heart, nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty and the power and the glory, around, above, and beneath me."

After having passed eleven months in Switzerland, in about the same frame of mind, he crossed the Alps, and entered Italy. Who can breathe the soft air of that beautiful land, without feeling a healing balm descend on wounds within? The clear atmosphere, and the serene sky, were to him like the indulgent caresses of a sister, bringing a hope—a promise—that peace, and even happiness, were about to visit his stricken soul. His first halt was at Milan. There he met with sympathetic, noble minds, instead of the envious, hypocritical, intolerant spirits that had caused him so much suffering; sweet and pleasant was it for him to live with such. Every evening he took his place in a box at the Scala, where the flower of the young intellects of Milan assembled, and where he met with

other persons of note, such as Abbé de Brême and Silvio Pellico: gentle, beautiful souls, burning with love of country, and sighing after its independence. From them he learnt more than ever to detest the humiliating yoke of foreign despotism that weighed on Italy; with the independence and frankness of character that belonged to him, he did not scruple to deplore it openly; and his imprudent generosity became a source of annoyance, persecution and calumny for himself. There he heard that passionate music which appeals so strongly to imagination and heart, because it harmonizes so naturally with all its surroundings in Italy. It was listening to this music, at times so pathetic and sweet, that emotion would often lend almost supernatural beauty to his countenance, so that even Mr. Stendhall, the least enthusiastic of men, was wont to say with enthusiasm, *that never, in his whole life, had he seen anything so beautiful and expressive as Lord Byron's look, or so sublime as his style of beauty.* There he gave himself freely up to all the fine emotions that art can raise. Stendhall accompanied him to the Brêra museum, "*and I admired*," says he, "*the depth of sentiment with which Lord Byron understood painters of most opposite schools, Raphael, Guercino, Luini, Titian. Guercino's picture of Hagar dismissed by Abraham quite electrified him, and, from that moment, the admiration he inspired rendered everybody mute around him.*"

"He improvised for at least an hour, and even better than Madame de Staël," says Stendhall again. "One day Monti was invited to recite before Lord Byron one of his (Monti's) poems which had met in Italy with most favour,—the first canto of the 'Mas-

cheroniana.'" The reading of these lines gave such intense pleasure to the author of 'Childe Harold' that Stendhall adds, he shall never forget the divine expression of his countenance on that occasion. "It was," says he, "the placid air of genius and power."

Thus taking interest and pleasure in all around him, if he did experience hours of melancholy (which is very probable, his wounds being so recent and so deep), he had, at the same time, strength to hide it from the public eye, and to express it only with his pen.

The single symptom that might be considered to betray, at this time, a continual malady of soul, was the indifference he showed towards the fair ladies of Milan, who, on their side, were full of enthusiasm about him, and with whom he refused to become acquainted, despite all their advances. But this reserve (though probably more marked and commented on at this particular moment of which we speak) belonged, nevertheless, to his nature. After having visited Lake Garda with that pleasure he always experienced from the beauties of nature, and then the tomb of Juliet at Verona, with the interest excited by a true story even more than by Shakespeare's poetry (since he could only take real interest in what was true), he went from Milan to Venice. I have mentioned in another chapter the impression made on him by Venice in particular, and Italy in general; how, aided by exterior circumstances, by the sympathies growing up around him, the severe studies he underwent, so as to keep his heart calm, and bridle an imagination too liable to be influenced by bitter memories; in a few months he began a new existence

there, with a more vigorous and healthy impulse for his genius.

When first victimised by the most senseless persecution, he was so surprised and confounded by the noise and violence of calumny, that his keen sentiment of injustice underwent a sort of numbness. On seeing himself thus brutally attacked on the one hand, and so feebly defended on the other, by lukewarm, pusillanimous friends, he may have questioned if he were not really in fault, and hesitated, perhaps, how to reply; for he almost spoke of himself as guilty in the farewell addressed to his cold-hearted wife, and also in the lines composed for his more deserving sister. This situation of mind shows itself without disguise, sadly depicted in the third canto of 'Childe Harold.' Manfred himself, that wondrous conception of genius, whose lot was cast amid all the sublimities of nature, despite his pride and his strength of will, yet was made to wear the sackcloth of penance. But, on arriving at Venice, when months had rolled on, and the Alps were between him and the injustice undergone,—after Lady Byron's new, incredible, and strange refusal to return,—he felt his conscience disencumbered of all morbid influences. The testimony given, the absolution awarded by this impartial, incorruptible judge, whom he had never ceased to consult, became sufficient for him. And by degrees, as he succeeded in forgetting, so as to have power to forgive, peace and tranquillity revisited his mind. Venice was the city of his dream; he had known her, he said, ere he visited her, and after the East she it was that haunted his imagination. Reality spoiled

nothing of his dream; he loved everything about her,—the solemn gaiety of her gondolas, the silence of her canals, the late hours of her theatres and soirées, the movement and animation reigning on St. Mark's, where the gay world nightly assembled. Even the decay of the town (which saddened him later), harmonising then with the whole scene, was not displeasing. He regretted the old costumes given up; but the carnival, though waning, still recalled ancient Venice, and rejoiced his heart. Familiar with the Italian language, he took pleasure in studying, also, the Venetian dialect, the naïveté and softness of which charmed him, especially on woman's lips. Stretched in his gondola, he loved to court the breezes of the Adriatic, especially at twilight and moonlit hours, unrivalled for their splendour in Venice. In summer and autumn he delighted to give the rein to his horse along the solitary banks of the Lido, or beside the flower-enamelled borders of the Brenta. He loved the simplicity of the women, the freedom from hypocrisy of the men. Feeling himself liked by those amongst whom chance or choice had thrown him, frequenting theatres and society that could both amuse and instruct, though powerless to fill his thoughts, for these latter required more substantial food, and some hard difficult study to occupy them, being free from all disquieting passions, and wishing to remain thus, sociable as he was by temperament, though loving solitude for the sake of his genius; under all these circumstances, he could satisfy, in due proportion, the double exigency of his nature; for he lived, as we have seen, amid a

small circle of sympathetic acquaintances, and of friends arriving from England, who clustered round him without interfering with the independence he had regained, and which formed the natural necessary element for his mind; though he had been deprived of it in England by the cant and pusillanimity of his friends. If, then, he was not exactly happy at this time, at least he was on the road leading to happiness. For he was beginning to make progress in the path of philosophy,—a gentle, indulgent, generous philosophy, as deep as it was clever and pleasing, and which afterwards ruled his life, and inspired his genius. All those who saw him at this period are unanimous in saying that melancholy then held aloof from him. In all his letters we find proof of the same. "Venice and I go on well together," wrote he to Murray.

And elsewhere,—"I go out a great deal, and am very well pleased."

Mr. Rose, who visited him at Venice, in the spring of 1818, began a poem which he addressed to him from Albano, where he was taking baths for his health, by alluding to the gaiety which Byron spread around him at the réunions which he liked.

But while those living near him, and at Venice, where his poetry was not known, would never have imagined him to be melancholy, in England and other places where people read the sorrow-breathing creations of his genius, he continued to be considered the very personification of melancholy or misanthropy. He knew, and laughed about it sometimes.

"I suppose now I shall never be able to shake off my sable, in public imagination, more particularly since

my moral wife demolished my reputation. However, not that, nor more than that, has yet extinguished my spirit, which always rises with the rebound."

And as he did not wish to be considered a misanthrope, he added to Moore in the same letter :—

"I wish you would also tell Jeffrey what you know,—that I was not, and indeed, am not, even *now*, the misanthropical and gloomy gentleman for which he takes me, but a facetious companion, getting on well with those with whom I am intimate, and as loquacious and laughing as if I were a much cleverer fellow."

And at the same time, to disabuse the public also, and show that he could write gaily, he set himself to study a kind of poetry thoroughly Italian in its spirit, and of which Berni is the father; poetry replete with wit, and somewhat free, but devoid of malice, even when it merges from gaiety into satire; a style unknown to England in its varied shades, and which it was easier for him to introduce than to make popular. 'Beppo' was his first essay in this line, and it contains too much genuine fun not to have been a natural product of his humour ere flowing from his pen.

On sending it to Murray as a mere sample of the style he thought it possible to introduce into the literature of his country, he said :—

"At least, this poem will show that I can write gaily, and will repel the accusation of monotony and affectation." *

But the gaiety visible at this period in his writings

* Letter 312.

and his conduct was not, however, uninterrupted. For such cheerfulness to be constant, neither a continuation of the causes producing it, nor yet the absence of English papers and reviews could quite suffice. It was necessary that no letters should come, awakening painful remembrances that had slumbered awhile, that there should be no necessity for selling his property in England,—a matter always complicated, and difficult of execution at a distance, and which forced upon him cares and occupations most opposed to his character, while affording sad proof of the negligence, ingratitude, and other faults of those entrusted with the management of his affairs. It would have required that friends who had neglected to prevent his departure, should not, when weary of seeing him no more, have conspired to bring about his return, devising a good means of so doing by obstacles thrown in the way of a successful issue to his affairs, which happy conclusion was absolutely necessary for his peace and independence. We see by his letters, written during the summer of 1818, that he was tormented in a thousand ways; sometimes not receiving any accounts, sometimes being advised to come nearer London, then, again, having no tidings of how several thousands had been disposed of. Besides that, he had constantly before his eyes a spectacle most painful for a generous heart to witness. That was Venice choked and expiring in the grip of her foreign rulers. The humiliation thus inflicted on the city of his dreams, and its noble race of inhabitants, and which was every instant repeated and proclaimed by the brutal voice of drums and cannons, with a thousand added vexations (necessary, perhaps, for keeping

up an abhorred sway), caused infinite suffering to his just and liberal nature, raising emotions of anger and pitying regret, that flowed from his pen in sublimely indignant language. Thereupon, the despots, unable to impose silence upon him, revenged themselves in various ways, echoing reports spread in London, and inventing new fables, which the idle people of Venice, more idle than elsewhere, and even the gondoliers repeated in their turn to strangers, to amuse and gain a few pence. We pass over any details of the persecution inflicted on him by English tourists, who, not actuated by sympathy, but out of sheer curiosity and eagerness to pick up all the gossip and idle tales in circulation, were wont to run after Lord Byron, intruding on his private walks, and even pressing into his very palace. Such conduct, of course, displeased him, and accordingly in the summer of 1818 we find traces of ill-humour visible in his correspondence, and even in the first two cantos of 'Don Juan.' Afterwards, when he had been laid hold of and absorbed by a great passion, his irritation merged into sadness, melancholy, disquietude, and irresolution.*

But if all this proves that sadness wearing the garb of melancholy sometimes approached him, even at Venice; we see too clearly its real and accidental causes to be able to ascribe it to a permanent and fatal disposition of temperament.

Many signs of suffering escaped his pen at this time. For instance, writing to Moore from Venice in 1818, and wishing to give him a picturesque description of a creature full of savage energy, who forced

* See 'Life in Italy.'

herself upon him in a thousand extravagant ways, refusing to leave his house, he said :—

"I like this kind of animal, and am sure that I should have preferred Medea to any woman that ever breathed. You may, perhaps, wonder at my speaking thus (making allusion to Lady Byron) . . . . . I could have forgiven the dagger or the bowl, anything but the *deliberate desolation* piled upon me, when I stood *alone upon my hearth* with my household gods shivered around me . . . . . Do you suppose I have forgotten or forgiven it? It has comparatively swallowed up in me every other feeling, and I shall remain only a spectator upon this earth until some great occasion presents itself, which may come yet. There are others more to be blamed than ——, and it is on these that my eyes are fixed unceasingly."

Meanwhile, until Providence should present him with this opportunity, another feeling took involuntary possession of his whole soul. But would not the sentiment which was about to swallow up or transform all others, and which was at last to bring him some happiness, also destroy the peace so carefully preserved in his heart by indifference since he left London? He seemed at first to have dreaded such a result himself; for, in one of the earliest letters addressed to the person beloved (letters which fully unveil his beautiful soul, and where one would vainly seek an indelicate or sensual expression), he tells her, "that he had resolved, on system, to avoid a great passion," but that she had put to flight all his resolutions, that he is wholly hers, and will become all she wishes, happy perhaps in her love, but never more at peace,—"*ma tranquillo mai più.*"

And he ends the letter with a verse quoted from Guarini's 'Pastor Fido.' *

His heart assuredly was satisfied, but precisely because he truly loved, and felt himself beloved; therefore did he also suffer from the impossibility of reconciling the exigencies of his heart with circumstances. In one of these beautiful letters, so full of simplicity and refinement, he tells her :—

"What we shall have to suffer is of common occurrence, and we must bear it like many others, for true love is never happy; but we two shall suffer still more because we are placed in no ordinary circumstances."

His real sentiments of soul are likewise displayed in that beautiful satirical poem, 'Don Juan,' in the third canto of which he exclaims :—

"Oh Love! what is it in this world of ours
Which makes it fatal to be loved? Ah, why
With cypress branches hast thou wreathed thy bowers,
And made thy best interpreter a sigh?"

Nevertheless, when he had left Venice, which became altogether distasteful to him, and gone to live at Ravenna, his heart grew calmer. To Murray he writes :—

"You inquire after my health and *spirits* in large letters; my health can't be very bad, for I cured myself of a sharp tertian ague in three weeks, with cold water, which had held my stoutest gondolier for months, notwithstanding all the bark of the apothecary,—a circumstance which surprised D'Aglietti,

* "Che giova a te, cor mio, l' esser amato?
Che giova a me l' aver si cara Amante?
Se tu, crudo Destino, ne dividi
Cio che amor ne stringe!"

who said it was a proof of great stamina, particularly in so epidemic a season. I did it out of dislike to the taste of bark (which I can't bear), and succeeded, contrary to the prophecies of everybody, by simply taking nothing at all. As to spirits, they are unequal, now high, now low,—like other people's, I suppose, and depending upon circumstances."

Having grown intimate with the Ccunt and Countess G——, he was requested by the former to accompany his young wife into society, to the play, everywhere in short; soon Lord Byron took up his abode in their palace, and the repose of heart and mind he thus attained was so great, that no sadness seemed able to come near him, as long as this tranquil, regular, pleasing sort of existence lasted, and it seemed destined to endure for ever.

But nothing is permanent here below, and especially happiness, be its source regular or irregular; such is the mysterious eternal law of this earthly life, doubtless one of probation. To this period of tranquillity, succeeded one of uneasiness and grief, which ended by awakening a little melancholy. Let us examine the causes of it in his position at that time.

The object of Lord Byron's love had obtained from His Holiness Pope Pius VII., at the solicitation of her parents, permission to leave her husband's house, and return home to her family. Consequently she had left in the month of July, and was leading a retired life in a country-house belonging to her parents. Thus Lord Byron, who had been accustomed to feel happy in her society, was now reduced to solitude in the same place her presence had gladdened. In order not to compromise her

in her delicate position, he was obliged even to deny himself the gratification of calling upon her in the country. Ravenna, which is always a sad kind of abode, becomes in autumn quite a desert, liable to fever. Everybody had gone into the country. Even if taste had not inclined Lord Byron to be alone, necessity would have compelled it; for there was no longer a single being with whom he could exchange a word or a thought. Equinoctial gales again swept the sea; and thus the wholesome exercise of swimming, so useful in restoring equilibrium to the faculties and calming the mind, was forbidden. If at least he could have roamed on horseback through the forest of pines! But no; the autumn rains, even in this lovely climate, last for weeks. In the absolute solitude of a town like Ravenna, imprisoned, so to say, within his own apartment, how could he avoid some emotions of sadness? He was thus assailed; and, as it always happened where he himself was concerned, he mistook its causes. Engrossed by an affection that was amply returned, feeling strong against the injustice of man and the hardships of fate, having become well nigh inaccessible to *ennui*, he was astonished at the sadness that always seemed to return in autumn, and imagined that it might be from some hereditary malady inherent to his temperament.

"This season kills me with sadness," he wrote to Madame G——, on the 28th of September; "when I have my mental malady, it is well for others that I keep away. I thank thee, from my heart, for the roses. Love me! My soul is like the leaves that fall in autumn, all yellow."

And then, as if he almost reproached himself with being sad without some cause existing in the heart, and, above all, not wishing to pain Madame G——, he wound up with a joke, saying:—"Here is a cantator;" a conventional word recalling some buffooneries in a play, and which signified:—"Here is a fine sentence!"

Certainly, the autumnal season, sad and rainy as it is, must have had great influence over him. Could it be otherwise with an organization like his? From this point of view, his melancholy, like his temperament, might be considered as hereditary. But would it have been developed without the aid of other causes?

Let us observe the date of the letter, wherein he blames the season, and the dates of those received from London, or those he addressed thither. The coincidence between them will show clearly that when he called himself melancholy, and accused the season, it occurred precisely on the day when he was most wearied and overwhelmed by a host of other disagreeable things. For instance, Murray, whose answers on several points he had been impatiently expecting, was seized with a new fit of silence. "There you are at your tricks."*

And then, when the silence was broken, the letters almost always brought him disagreeable accounts. Wishing to disgust him with Italy, they sent him volumes full of unjust, stupid attacks on Italy and the Italians whom he liked.

"These fools," exclaimed he, "will force me to

* Letter 386.

write a book myself on Italy, to tell them broadly *they have lied.*"

Nothing was more disagreeable, and even hurtful to him, at this time, than the report of his return to England; and they wrote him word that his presence in London was asserted on all sides, that many persons declared that they had seen him, and that Lady C. L—— had been to call at his house fully persuaded that he was there.*

"Pray do not let the papers paragraph me back to England. They may say what they please, any loathsome abuse but that. Contradict it."

In consequence of this invention, even his newspapers were no longer sent to him; and when he spoke of the harm and annoyance thus occasioned, annoyance increased by Murray's silence, his displeasure certainly amounted to anger. At this time also he was informed by letter that some English tourists, on returning home, had boasted that they *could* have been presented to him at Venice, but *would not.*

The trial of the unfortunate queen was just coming on at this time, and the whole proceeding, accompanied as it was with so many cruel, indecent circumstances, revolted him in the highest degree.

"No one here," said he, "believes a word of all the infamous depositions made."

The article in 'Blackwood's Magazine,' which was so abominably libellous as to force him out of the silence *he had adopted for his rule*, was often present to his thought; for he dreaded lest his editor should for the sake of lucre, publish 'Don Juan' with his

* Letter 389.

name, and lest the Noels and other enemies, out of revenge, should profit thereby to contest his right of guardianship over his child, as had been the case with Shelley.

"Recollect, that if you put my name to 'Don Juan' in these canting days, any lawyer might oppose my guardian-right of my daughter in Chancery, on the plea of its containing the parody. Such are the perils of a foolish jest. I was not aware of this at the time, but you will find it correct, I believe; and you may be sure that the Noels would not let it slip. Now, I prefer my child to a poem at any time."

Moreover, amid all these preoccupations, Hobhouse wrote him word that he should be obliged to go to England for the Queen's trial; and we know how repugnant this necessity was to Lord Byron. His little Allegra had just fallen rather dangerously ill; Countess G——, notwithstanding the sentence pronounced by His Holiness, continued to be tormented by her husband, who refused to accept the decision of Rome, because he did not wish for a separation. The Papal Government, pushed on by the Austrian police, had recourse to a thousand small vexatious measures, to make Lord Byron quit Ravenna, where he had given offence by becoming too popular with the liberal party.

Lastly, we may further add that, even in those days, he was suffering from some jealous susceptibility, though knowing well how he was beloved. For in the letter, dated 28th of September, where he says, "his soul is sick," he also complains of Madame G——'s having passed some hours at Ravenna *without letting him know, and of her having thought fit to hide from him certain steps taken.*

This autumn was followed by a winter still more disagreeably exceptional than the preceding one. The most inclement weather prevailed during the month of January, and generally throughout the winter.

"Bad weather, this 4th of January," he writes in his Memoranda, "as bad as in London itself."

The sirocco, a wind that depresses even people without nerves, was blowing and melting the ice. The streets and roads were transformed into pools of half-congealed mud. He was somewhat "*out of spirits.*" But still he hoped :—

"If the roads and weather allow, I shall go out on horseback to-morrow. It is high time; already we have had a week of this work: snow and sirocco one day, ice and snow the other. A sad climate for Italy; but these two winters have been extraordinary."

The next day, he got up "*dull and drooping.*" The weather had not changed. Lord Byron absolutely required to breathe a little fresh air every day, to take exercise on horseback. His health was excellent, but on these two conditions; otherwise, it failed. His temper clouded over, without air and exercise. During the wretched days he was obliged to remain at home, he had not even the diversion letters and newspapers might have afforded, since no post came in. His sole amusement consisted in stirring the fire, and playing with Lion, his mastiff, or with his little menagerie. So much did he suffer from it all, that his kind heart bestowed pity even on his horses :—

" . . . . Horses must have exercise—get a

ride as soon as weather serves; deuced muggy still. An Italian winter is a sad thing, but all the other seasons are charming."

On the 7th of January, he adds:—

"Still rain, mist, snow, drizzle, and all the incalculable combinations of a climate where heat and cold struggle for mastery."

If the weather cleared up one day, it was only to become more inclement the next.

On the 12th he wrote in his journal:—

"The weather still so humid and impracticable, that London, in its most oppressive fogs, were a summer bower to this mist and sirocco, which has now lasted (but with one day's interval), chequered with snow or heavy rain only, since the 30th of December, 1820. It is so far lucky that I have a literary turn; but it is very tiresome not to be able to stir out, in comfort, on any horse but Pegasus, for so many days. The roads are even worse than the weather, by the long splashing, and the heavy soil, and the inundations."

And on the 19th:—

"Winter's wind somewhat more unkind than ingratitude itself, though Shakespeare says otherwise. . . . . Rather low in spirits—certainly hippish—liver touched—will take a dose of salts."

There was, however, too much elasticity of spirits in him, and his melancholy was not sufficiently deep for it to last. His evening visit to Countess G—— at eight o'clock (the day's event consoling for all else), a few simple airs played by her on the piano, some slight diversion, such as a ray of sunshine between two showers, or a star in the heavens raising hopes of a brighter morrow, sufficed to

clear up his horizon. What always raised his spirits was the prospect of some good or great and generous action to perform, such, in those days, as contributing to the deliverance of a nation. Then, not only did the sirocco and falling rain cease to act on his nerves, as he himself acknowledged, but his genius would start into fresh life, making him snatch a pen, and write off in a few days admirable poems,* worthy to be the fruit of long years of meditation.

We may, then, believe that if his melancholy had been left solely to the physical and moral influences surrounding him at this time, it would never have become much developed, or at least would have soon passed away, like morning mists that rise in the east to be quickly dissipated by the rays of the sun.

But just as these slight vapours may form into a cloud, if winds arise in another part of the sky, bringing fresh moisture to them, so a slight and fugitive sadness in him might be deepened and prolonged through circumstances. And this was exactly what happened in the year of which we speak, for it was full of disappointments and grief for him. To arrive at this persuasion, it is sufficient to remark the coincidence of dates. For example, we find in his Memoranda, under the date of 18th of January, 1821 :—

"At eight proposed to go out. Lega came in with a letter about a bill *unpaid* at Venice, which I thought paid months ago. I flew into a paroxysm of rage, which almost made me faint. I have not been well ever since. I deserve it for being such a fool—but

* It was then than 'Sardanapalus' came to light.

it *was* provoking—a set of scoundrels! It is, however, but five-and-twenty pounds."

Then, again, on the 19th we find:—

"Rode. Winter's wind somewhat more unkind than ingratitude itself, though Shakespeare says otherwise. At least I am so much more accustomed to meet with ingratitude than the north wind, that I thought the latter the sharper of the two. I had met with both in the course of twenty-four hours, so could judge."

And on the same day he wrote to Murray a letter, in which, after mentioning a host of vexations and worries, he ends by saying:—

"I am in bad humour—some obstructions in business with those plaguing trustees, who object to an advantageous loan, which I was to furnish to a nobleman (Lord B——) on mortgage, because his property is in Ireland, have shown me how a man is treated in his absence."

Between the 19th and the 22nd, his physical and moral indisposition seemed to last; for he makes reflections in his Memoranda, upon melancholy bilious people, and says that he has not even sufficient energy to go on with his tragedy of 'Sardanapalus,' and that he has ceased composing for the last few days. Now, it was precisely the 20th that he was more than ever annoyed by the obstinacy of the London Theatre managers, for, despite his determination and his clear right, his protestations and entreaties, they were resolved, said the newspapers that came to hand, on having 'Marino Faliero' acted. He had already written to Murray:—

"I must really and seriously request that you will

beg of Messrs. Harris or Elliston to let the Doge alone: it is not an acting play; it will not serve their purpose; it will destroy yours (the sale); and it will distress me. It is not courteous, it is hardly even gentlemanly, to persist in this appropriation of a man's writings to their mountebanks."

He wrote thus, on the 19th; but on the 20th his fears had increased to such a pitch that he also addressed the Lord Chamberlain, requesting him to forbid this representation. Indeed, so great was his annoyance, that he wrote to Murray twice in the same day:—

"I wish you would speak to Lord Holland, and to all my friends and yours, to interest themselves in preventing this cursed attempt at representation.

"God help me! at this distance, I am treated like a corpse or a fool by the few people that I thought I could rely upon; and I *was* a fool to think any better of them than of the rest of mankind."

On the 21st his melancholy does not appear to have worn off. This is to be attributed to the additions to all the causes of the previous day; and to the news of the illness of Moore, whom he loved so much, there came, in addition, the following event which we give in his own words:—

"To-morrow is my birthday—that is to say, at twelve o' the clock, midnight—i.e., in twelve minutes, I shall have completed thirty-three years of age!!! and I go to my bed with a heaviness of heart at having lived so long, and to so little purpose."

Let me be allowed here to make some comment on the beauty of the sentiment causing this sadness; for certainly he was not actuated by a common sensual,

selfish, regret at youth departing. Beauty, youth, love, fortune, and celebrity, all smiled on him then; he possessed every one of them to a degree capable of satisfying any vanity, or any pride, but they were inadequate, for a modesty so rare and so admirable as his! His regrets certainly did not apply to youth; he was only thirty-three years of age! Nor yet to beauty, for he possessed it in the highest degree; nor to fame, that had only too much been his; nor to love, for he was the object of real idolatry;* nor to any actions that called for repentance. To what, then, did they apply? To his *aspirations* after greater things, after *ideal perfections*, that neither he nor any one else can arrive at here below. It was a soaring after the infinite!

The cause, noble in itself, of this sadness consisted then in a sort of nostalgia for the great, the beautiful, the good. The simple words in which he expressed it enable us to well understand its nature. "I do not regret this year," said he, "*for what I have done, but for what I have not done!*"

I will not further multiply proofs; suffice it to say, that this year having been one of incessant annoyances to him, not only cannot we be surprised that he should have experienced moments of sadness, but we might rather be astonished at their being so few, if we did not know that living above all for heart, and his heart being then satisfied, he found therein compensation for all the rest.

"Thanks for your compliments of the year. I hope that it will be pleasanter than the last. I speak with reference to England only, as far as regards my-

* See Chapter 'Life in Ravenna.'

self, where I had every kind of disappointment—lost an important law suit—and the trustees of Lady Byron refusing to allow of an advantageous loan to be made from my property to Lord Blessington, &c., by way of closing the four seasons. These, and a hundred other such things, made a year of bitter business for me in England. Luckily things were a little pleasanter for me here, else I should have taken the liberty of Hannibal's ring."

The political and revolutionary events then taking place in Romagna and throughout Italy, caused emotions and sentiments of too strong a nature in Lord Byron to be confounded with sadness; but they may well have contributed to develope largely certain melancholy inclinations discoverable towards autumn. By degrees, as the first strength of grief passes away, it leaves behind a sort of melancholy current in the soul, which, without being the sentiment itself, serves as a conductor for it, making it gush forth on occurrence of the smallest cause. Causes with him were not so slight at this period, although he considered them such * out of the superabundance of his philosophical spirit; and the year that began with so many contradictions, ended in the same manner. The hope of seeing the Counts Gamba back again at Ravenna was daily lessening. All the letters Madame G—— wrote to him from Florence and Pisa, penned as they were amid the anguish of fear lest Lord Byron should be assassinated at Ravenna, were necessarily pregnant with alarm and affliction.

Meanwhile his interests were being neglected in

* "Many small articles make up a sum,
And hey ho for Caleb Quotem, oh!"

London. Murray irritated him by his inexplicable negligence, or worried him with sending foolish publications and provoking reviews. Gifford, a critic he loved and revered, from whom no praise, he said, could compensate for any blame,—Gifford, whose ideas on the drama were quite opposite to his own, had just been censuring his beautiful dramatic compositions.* Moreover, Italy having failed in her attempts at independence, was insulted in her misfortune by that world which smiles only on success, and thus, indirectly, the persons loved and esteemed by Lord Byron came in for their share of outrage. And all these contradictions, *where* and *when* did he experience them? At Ravenna, in a solitude and isolation that would have made the bravest stoic shudder, and that was prejudicial to him without his being aware of it. For there were two distinct temperaments in Lord Byron, that of his genius and that of his humanity, and the wants of one were not always those of the other. The first, from its nature and manifestations, required solitude. The second, eminently sociable, while yielding to the tyranny of the first, or bearing it from force of circumstance, suffered nevertheless when solitude became too complete. It was not the society of the great world, nor what are called its pleasures, that Lord Byron required; but a society of friends and clever persons capable of affording a little diversion to his monotonous life. When this twofold want did not meet with reasonable satisfaction, a certain degree of melancholy necessarily developed itself. "*When he was not thrown into some unbearable sort of solitude,*

* See Letter 435.

like that in which he found himself at Ravenna," says Madame G——, "*his good humour and gaiety only varied when letters from England came to move and agitate him, or when he suffered morally.*

"*I must, however, add that all sensitive agents, all atmospherical impressions, acted on him more than on others, and it might almost be said that his sky was mirrored in his soul, the latter often taking its colour from the former; and if by that is understood the hereditary malady spoken of by others and himself, then they are right, for he had truly inherited a most impressionable temperament.*"

Moreover, the absolute, inexorable solitude caused by the absence of all his friends from Ravenna, was still further augmented by the occurrence of intermittent marshy fevers, which everybody endeavours to avoid by flying from Ravenna at the close of summer, and to which he fell a prey. This fever, that seized hold of him, and even prevented his departure, might alone have sufficed to render him melancholy, for nothing more inclines to sadness. But so intimate was his persuasion that when sadness does not proceed from the heart it has no cause for existence, and so little was he occupied with self, that he would not allow there could be sufficient cause for melancholy in all the sufferings weighing upon him.

"I ride, I am not intemperate in eating or drinking, and my general health is as usual, except a slight ague, which rather does good than not. It must be constitutional; for I know nothing more than usual to depress me to that degree."*

* Moore, Letter 471.

But so little was it the necessary product of his temperament alone, so much, on the contrary, did it result from a host of causes accidentally united, that he had scarcely arrived at Pisa, where most of the causes either ceased or were neutralised, than his mind recovered its serenity, and he could write to Moore :—

"At present, owing to the climate (I can walk down into my garden and pluck my own oranges, indulging in this meridian luxury of proprietorship) my spirits are much better."

Whenever, then, his heart was happy in the happiness of those he loved, wherever he found an intellectual society to animate the mind, diverting and amusing him without imposing the chains of etiquette, we vainly seek the faintest trace of melancholy. But two great griefs soon befell him at Pisa, for sorrow never made long truces with Byron. Truly might we say that fate ceased not from making him pay for the privilege of his great superiority, by all the sufferings he endured. Soon after his arrival at Pisa, his little daughter Allegra, whom he was having educated at a convent in Romagna, died of fever; and shortly afterwards Shelley was drowned! About the same time the publication of 'Cain,' then going on, raised a perfect storm, furnishing his enemies with pretexts for attacking and slandering him more than ever. They did it in a manner so violent and unjust, bringing in likewise his publisher Murray, that Lord Byron thought it incumbent on him to send a challenge to the poet laureate, the most perfidious amongst them. At this same period, Hunt, who had lost all means of existence by the death of

Shelley, forced himself on Lord Byron in such a disagreeable way as to become the plague of his life. Lastly, in consequence of a quarrel that arose between Serjeant Masi and Lord Byron's riding companions, an arbitrary measure was taken, which again compelled his friends—the Counts Gamba—to leave Pisa for Genoa; and he, though free to remain, resolved on sharing their fate and quitting Pisa likewise. For the Government, though subservient to Austrian rule, did not dare to apply the same unjust decree to an English subject of such high rank. Nevertheless, if we except the death of his little girl, which caused him profound sorrow—although he bore it with all the fortitude belonging to his great soul—and the death of Shelley, which also afflicted him greatly, none of the other annoyances had power to grieve him or to create melancholy.

"It seems to me," he wrote to Murray, "that what with my own country and other lands, there has been *hot water enough* for some time." This manner of announcing so many disagreeables, shows what self-possession he had arrived at, and how he viewed all things calmly and sagely, as Disraeli portrays him with truth in 'Venetia,' when he makes him say:—"'*As long as the world leaves us quiet, and does not burn us alive, we ought to be pleased. I have grown callous to all they say*,' observed Herbert. '*And I also*,' replied Lord Cadurcis." Cadurcis and Herbert both represent Lord Byron; for Disraeli, like Moore, having felt that Lord Byron had enough in him to furnish several individualities, all equally powerful, thought it necessary to call in the aid of this double personification, in order to paint his nature in all its

richness, with the changes to be wrought by time and events.

If the war waged against Lord Byron by envy, bigotry, and wickedness, had had power to create emotion during youth, and even later, the gentle, wise philosophy he afterwards acquired in the school of adversity, so elevated his mind, that he could no longer suffer, except from wounds of heart, provided his conscience were at rest. When the stupid persecution raised against him on the appearance of 'Cain' took place, he wrote to Murray from Pisa, on the 8th of February :—

"All the *row* about *me* has no otherwise affected me than by the attack upon yourself, which is ungenerous in Church and State. . . . I can only say, 'Me, me; en adeum qui feci;'—that any proceedings directed against you, I beg may be transferred to me, who am willing, and *ought*, to endure them all."

And then he ends his letter, saying, "I write to you about all this row of bad passions and absurdities, with the *summer* moon (for here our winter is clearer than your dog-days), lighting the winding Arno, with all her buildings and bridges,—so quiet and still!—*What nothings are we before the least of these stars!*"

Soon after, and while still suffering under the same persecution from his enemies and weak fools, he wrote to Moore, from Montenero, recalling in his usual vein of pleasantry, their mutual adventures in fashionable London life, and saying, that he should have done better while listening to Moore as he tuned his harp and sang, *to have thrown*

himself out of the window, ere marrying a Miss Milbank.

"I speak merely of my marriage, and its consequences, distresses, and calumnies; for I have been much more happy, on the whole, *since*, than I ever could have been with her."

And some time after, conversing with Madame G——, examining and analysing all he might have done as an orator and a politician, if he had remained in England, he added :—

"That then he would not have known her, and that no other advantages could have given him the happiness which he found in real affection."

This conversation, interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Mr. Hobhouse, and which, but for the inexplicable sadness arising from presentiments, would have made earth a paradise for the person to whom it was addressed, took place at Pisa, in Lord Byron's garden, a few days before his departure for Genoa. At Genoa, he continued to lead the same retired, studious, simple kind of life ; and, although the winter was this year again extremely rigorous, and although his health had been slightly affected since the day of Shelley's funeral, and his stay at Genoa made unpleasant by the ennui proceeding from Mr. Hunt's presence there,* still he had no fit of what can be called melancholy, until he decided on leaving for Greece. Then the sadness that he would fain have concealed, but could not, which he betrayed in the parting hour, acknowledged while climbing the hill of Albano, and which often brought tears to his eyes on board the vessel—this sadness had

* See his 'Life at Genoa.'

its source in the deepest sentiments of his heart. In Greece, we know, by the unanimous and constant testimony of all who saw him there, that the rare fits of melancholy he experienced, all arose from the same cause. During his sojourn in the Ionian Islands, as soon as letters from Italy had calmed his uneasiness, finding himself surrounded by general esteem, affection, and admiration, seeing justice dawn for him, and confusion for his enemies, being consoled also with the prospect of a future, and that, with heart at ease, he might at last shed happiness around him; then he was ever to be found full of serenity and even gaiety, *only intent on noble virtuous actions.* One day, however, a great melancholy seized upon him, and all the good around suddenly appeared to vanish. Whence did this arise? His letters tell us:—

"Poor Byron!" wrote Count Gamba, to his sister, on the 14th of October, "he has been much concerned by the news which reached him some fortnight ago, about the headache of his dear Ada. You may imagine how *triste* were the workings of his fancy, to which he added the fear of having to spend several months without hearing any further tidings of her; besides the suspicion that the truth was either kept back from him or disguised. Happily, another bulletin has reached him, to say that she is all right again,—and one more, to announce that the child is in good health, with the exception of a slight pain in the eyes. His melancholy is, therefore, a little mitigated, though it has not completely disappeared."

The preoccupation, disquietude, and anxiety, which he experienced more or less continuously in Greece,

and above all, at Missolonghi, and which I have mentioned elsewhere, certainly did agitate, trouble, and even irritate him sometimes; but then it was in such a passing way, on account of the great empire he had acquired over himself, that every one during his sojourn in the islands, and often even at Missolonghi, unanimously pronounced gaiety to be his predominant disposition. And, truly, it was only to griefs proceeding from the heart that he granted power to cloud his brow with any kind of melancholy.

After this long analysis, and before summing up, it still remains for us to examine a species of melancholy that seems not to come within our limits, but which occasionally seized upon him on his first waking in the morning:—

"I have been considering what can be the reason why I always wake at a certain hour in the morning, and always in very bad spirits—I may say, in actual despair and despondency, in all respects—even of that which pleased me over-night. In about an hour or two, this goes off, and I compose myself either to sleep again, or, at least, to quiet. . . . What is it?—liver? . . . I suppose that it is all hypochondriasis."

What name shall we give to this physiological phenomenon? Was it hypochondriasis, as he imagined? That Lord Byron's temperament, so sensitive to all moral causes, so vulnerable to all atmospherical influences, should likewise have contained a vein of hypochondriasis, is not only possible, but likely. And were we as partial as we wish to be just, there would certainly be no reason for denying it. Hypochondriasis is an infirmity not a fault. Lord Byron

himself, when informed that such a one complained of being called hypochondriacal, replied somewhat to the following effect:—"I cannot conceive how a man in perfect good health can feel wounded by being told that he is hypochondriacal, since his face and his conduct refute the accusation. Were this accusation ever to prove correct, to what does it amount? except to say that he has a liver complaint.

"'I shall publish it before the whole world,' said the clever Smelfungus. 'I should prefer telling my doctor,' said I. There is nothing dishonourable in such an illness, which is more especially that of people who are studious. It has been the illness of those who are good, wise, clever, and even light-hearted. Regnard, Molière, Johnson, Gray, Burns, were all more or less given to it. Mendelssohn and Bayle were often so afflicted with it, that they were obliged to have recourse to toys, and to count the slates on the roof of the houses opposite, in order to distract their attention. Johnson says, that oftentimes he would have given a limb to raise his spirits."

But, nevertheless, when we seek truth for itself, and not for its results, nor to make it help out a system, we must go to the bottom of things, and reveal all we discover. Thus, after having spoken of this physiological phenomenon, which he suspects to be hypochondriasis, Byron adds, that it came upon him, accompanied with great thirst, that the London chemist, Mann, had cured him of it in three days, that it always yielded to a few doses of salts, and that the phenomenon always recurred and ended at the same hours. It appears, then, to me, that all these

symptoms are far from indicating a serious and incurable hereditary malady, which would not be likely to have yielded to doses of salts, and which his general good health would seem to exclude. I consider them rather to point, for their cause, to his diet, which was *quite insufficient for him, and even hurtful, likely to affect the most robust health, and much more that of a man whose organization was so sensitive and delicate.* And, as this system of denying his body what was necessary for it increased the demands of his mind, which in its turn revenged itself on the body, the result was that Lord Byron voluntarily failed in the duties which every man owes to himself. Therefore, I think it more just to rank the melancholy arising from such causes, among his *faults*, and not among the accidents of life, or his natural disposition.*

Now, having examined his melancholy under all its phases, having proved more what it was not than what it was, we shall sum up with saying, that Lord Byron really experienced, during his short life, every kind of sadness. First, in early youth, he had to encounter disappointments, mortifications, disenchantments, deep moral suffering; then the constant warfare of envy, resulting in cruel, unceasing slanders; then, all the philosophical sadness arising in great minds, the best endowed and the noblest, from the emptiness of earthly things; then that unslakeable thirst for the true, the just, the perfect; that sort of nostalgia which the noblest souls experience, because their home is not here, because reality disgusts them, from the striking contrast it presents with

* See Chapter 'Faults.'

the ideal type, in their mind, especially at our epoch, and in our present social condition, when men can with difficulty preserve interior calm by dint of compulsory occupations requiring much energy. And, lastly, there was the sadness inherent to a physical temperament of such exquisite sensibility. Yet, notwithstanding all the above, and though Lord Byron was condemned to drain the cup of bitterness to its dregs, we think he ought not to be classed among geniuses exclusively swayed by the melancholy in their nature, since almost all his sadness sprang from accident, and from a sort of fictitious temperament produced by circumstances. Thus his melancholy, being fictitious, remained generally subject in real life to his fine natural temperament, only gaining the mastery when he was under the influence of inspiration, and with pen in hand.

"All is strange," says La Bruyère, "in the humour, morals, and manners of most men. . . . The wants of this life, the situation in which we are, necessity's law, force *nature, and cause great changes in it.* Thus such men cannot be defined, thoroughly and in themselves; too many external things affect, change, and overwhelm them; they are not precisely what they are, or rather, what they appear to be."

Thus, then, having a natural disposition for gaiety received from God, and which I should call *interior*, which always had the upper hand in all important actions of his life, but which was only truly known by those who approached him closely, I conclude that gaiety often predominated, and ought to have predominated much more, in Lord Byron's life.

But through the fictitious character, which I will call *exterior*, derived from *education*, *from circumstances of family*, *country*, *and association*, which (apparently) modified the first, and gave the world sometimes a reason, and sometimes a pretext for inventing that dark myth called by his name, *and which really only influenced his writings*, melancholy often predominated in his life. However, its sway was less in reality than in the imagination of those who wished to identify the man with the poet, and to find the real Lord Byron in the heroes of his early poems.

CHAPTER XV.

LOVE OF TRUTH; OR, CONSCIENCE A CHIEF CHARACTERISTIC OF LORD BYRON.

Some of Lord Byron's biographers, unable to overcome the difficulty of defining so complete a character, or of explaining, by ordinary rules, certain contradictions apparent in his rich nature, think to excuse their own inefficiency and elude the difficulty, by saying that he did not possess one of those striking points, or decided inclinations, that constitute a man's moral physiognomy. They pretend that his qualities of heart and mind, his passions, inclinations, virtues, faults, are so combined in his ardent, mobile nature, as to make him in reality the sport of chance; and that no inclination or passion whatsoever could ever become mistress of his heart or mind, so as to constitute the basis of a character, and render it possible to define it.

Moore himself, for reasons I have mentioned,* and which have been sufficiently spoken of in another chapter, contents himself with saying that Lord Byron's intellectual and moral attributes were so dazzling, contradictory, complicated, and varied, beyond all example, that it may be truly said there was not one man, but several men, in him:—

"So various, indeed, and contradictory, were his attributes, both moral and intellectual, that he may

* See Introduction.

be pronounced to have been, not one, but many; nor would it be any great exaggeration of the truth to say that, out of the mere partition of the properties of his single mind, a plurality of characters, all different and all vigorous, might have been furnished. It was this multiform aspect exhibited by him that led the world, during his short, wondrous career, to compare him with that medley host of personages, almost all differing from each other, which he playfully enumerates in one of his journals."

These observations of Moore's are only true from a certain point of view—the richness of Lord Byron's nature. But even if this exuberance of faculties, united in one individual, had not been already in itself a character, and had not constituted a well-marked distinct personality, almost unique in kind, Moore would have been at variance with the most profound moralists, who agree that human nature never has the simplicity of a geometrical figure, and that, in reality, characters always are mixed, complicated, composed of opposite elements, of incompatible inclinations and passions. For Moore appears to think that men are almost always swayed by one chief passion, round which, as round a pivot, life unrolls itself, just as we see in theatrical pieces. But even if this system were correct, intimate as he was with Lord Byron, and so full of perspicacity, could he not have found, towering above the rich profusion of qualities in his friend, one dominant passion? Yes, he ought to have discovered it; but there was a *struggle* in Moore between the love of justice and his friendship for Lord Byron on one side, *and the desire, alas! of keeping fair with a host*

of prejudices arrayed against Lord Byron on the other; and on the favour of these persons Moore felt that his own position, or rather his pleasure in society, depended. The master-passion that occupied so great a place in Lord Byron's mind, was his *love of truth, with all the qualities flowing from it.*

It may, perhaps, be said that all beautiful souls love truth more or less. Yes; but seldom does this quality acquire such complete development as in Lord Byron. For with him it was a *real passion*, since it gave the law, so to say, to his heart, his mind, and all the actions of his life. This extraordinary attraction, coming in contact with the lies, hypocrisy, baseness, cowardice, and deceitfulness of others, often raised indignation to such a pitch that he could not help showing and expressing it. Thus his love of truth affected his social status in England, doing him immense harm; and, if it contributed to his greatness and his heroism, so it likewise added to his sorrows.

This noble quality showed itself in him, we may say, from his birth, under the form of *sincerity, frankness, a passion for justice, loyalty, delicacy, honour, and likewise in the shape of special hatred for all hypocrisy, and for that shade of it peculiar to England, called cant.*

Amid all the passions and events of life, whatsoever the consequences, Lord Byron always went straight at truth; as the hero marches up under fire, or the saint to martyrdom. A lie was not only a lie to him, it was also an injustice, a cowardice, the mark of a corrupt soul, an inconceivable thing, and not to be forgiven. A child, at Aberdeen, he was

taken to the play to see one of Shakespeare's pieces, wherein an actor, showing the sun, says it is the moon. He was a timid child, but (incapable then of understanding Shakespeare's meaning) this outrage on truth excited him so far that he rose from his seat and exclaimed: "*I tell you, my dear sir, that it is the sun.*" With regard to lying, he remained his whole life the child of Aberdeen.

Neither his nurses nor preceptors ever surprised him in a lie. Education, which in England, more than elsewhere, modifies and shapes men according to the requirements of their social position, had no power to affect the fundamental part of his nature. While forming his mind, it did not change his heart. It destroyed some very dear illusions, and made his soul grow sick with disappointment, so that he never ceased regretting his happy childhood. In some respects it even had power to superadd a fictitious character to his real one, but his qualities of soul and his natural character still remained untouched.

The ardent affection he entertained for one of the masters at Harrow—Dr. Drury—made him feel dislike to this gentleman's successor. Having been asked to dinner by him Lord Byron declined, because, he said, that by accepting, *he should belie his heart*. At the University, he, like his companions, ran after the young girls of Cambridge and its environs, but he never seduced or deceived any. Early in life he adopted the good habit of examining himself most rigidly; and so strict was his conscience, that, where his companions saw reason to excuse him, he, on the contrary, found cause for self-reproach.

It was this same imperious, innate want of his nature, which, combined with certain circumstances, made him ill for a time. The malady was one quite foreign to his temperament, springing from self-depreciation, and because he did not then find sufficient gratification in society. A sort of misanthropy stole over his soul, chaining him to the East for two years, as a land where both soul and heart were less tried.

On his return home, the impressionability belonging to his ardent, enthusiastic nature may have produced undue excitement, but no bad feeling could ever dim the lustre of the nobler passion that held sway over him.

For him truth was more than a virtue, it was an imperative duty. Indulgent as he ever showed himself towards all weaknesses in general, and especially towards the faults committed by his servants, he could not forgive *a lie*.

At Ravenna, a young woman attached to the service of his little Allegra, being unwilling to avow, for fear of dismissal, that Allegra had had a fall, though the child bore the mark of it, told an untruth instead. No intercession could prevail on Lord Byron to pardon her, and she was sent away.*

Though eager for glory—especially at an age when not having yet arrived at it, he ignored the bite of the serpent that often lurks within a garland of roses—he yet repelled all undue praise, and was much more indignant at receiving it, than when unmerited blame was heaped upon him. Once, having been compared to a man of high standing in

* See 'Life in Italy.'

French literature, he, anxious to prove that there could be no resemblance between him and this great man, replied:—"If the thing were true, it might flatter me; but it is impossible to accept fictions with pleasure."

When Dallas—who only knew him then by his family name—read his early productions, he was enchanted with poetry that often rose to the sublime, and was always chivalrous in feeling, "which denoted," he said, "a heart full of honourable sentiments, and formed for virtue." This is a precious verdict, coming, as it does, from a man so bigoted in all respects as the elder Dallas. He adds afterwards that the perusal of these verses, and the sentiments contained in them, made him discover great affinity of mind between the young author and another literary man, who was equally remarkable as a poet, an orator, and an historian—"*the great and good Lord Lyttelton of immortal fame.*" "And I doubt not," added Dallas, "that one day, like him, he will confer more honour on the peerage than it can ever reflect on him." Such a compliment from a man so rigid and respectable might certainly have tempted the most ordinary self-love, but Lord Byron, applying his magnifying-glass to his conscience, and comparing what he saw there with his ideal, did not conceive he merited such praise. Accordingly he answered with candour that enchanted Dallas himself:—

"Though our periodical censors have been uncommonly lenient, I confess a tribute from a man of acknowledged genius is still more flattering. But

I am afraid I should forfeit all claim to candour, if I did not decline such praise as I do not deserve; and this is, I am sorry to say, the case in the present instance. My pretensions to virtue are, unluckily, so few, that, though I should be happy to deserve your praise, I cannot accept your applause in that respect."

Thus, from fear of being wanting in truth, he exaggerated his youthful imperfections, nor could find any excuse for them. And in the same way throughout life his dread of making himself out better than he was, led him into the opposite defect of representing himself as far inferior to his real worth.

If from considering of the man, we turn to look at the author, we shall still always find the same passion for truth. By degrees, as he observed society around him, this passion increased, for he found the dominant vice was precisely that one most repugnant to his nature. If Lord Byron ever admitted, with La Rochefoucault, *that hypocrisy is a homage vice renders to virtue*, he did not the less consider this homage as degrading to him who offered it, insulting to those to whom it is addressed, and most corrupting in its effect upon the soul.

Thus, then, he from an early period considered hypocrisy and cant as monsters in the moral world, to be combated energetically whenever an opportunity should present itself, and he resolved on doing so with all the intrepidity and independence of which his nature was capable. His natural gentleness disappeared in presence of the *whited sepulchres*, the *Pharisees* of our day. His whole literary life was

one struggle against this vice, "the crying sin of the times," * as he called it.

His conscience was quite as strict with regard to intellectual things as it was in the domain of morals. We might even call it marvellously strict for our epoch, for the decay of truth forms a sadly striking characteristic of the present time. I know not what modern critic it is who says that a general enervation of intelligence and languor of soul now prevail in this respect; that the majesty of truth has been profaned, and the ancient regard in which she was held has been destroyed by religious sects, philosophical systems, the insolent attacks of the press, and by the revolution that has taken place in ideas as well as in deeds. Thence the general tendency to place truth and error on the same footing, in theory and in practice. Thence the equality of rights established between both, and which has become like the normal state of mind general in society.

Certainly, in our day, the love and practice of truth have grown obsolete; dramatic pieces and works of fiction, indeed all kinds of literature, especially biography, and even history, combine to outrage truth with impunity; no compunction is felt in transforming great characters into monsters, and monsters into heroes. People are no longer astonished that travellers' narratives should be like poems, good or bad, works of imagination full of anachronisms, exaggerations, impossibilities, making the sea take the place of mountains, and putting mountains where the sea should be. Truth is hidden as dangerous, not always to humanity, but to private

* Preface to canto xi. of 'Don Juan.'

interests to which it might bring smaller gains. Now if, at an epoch like this, we meet with geniuses, or even conscientious talents, sacrificing, both in their works and their actions, every interest or consideration to truth, ought we not to look upon them as real marvels? Undoubtedly we ought, and there can be no question that Lord Byron belonged to the small number of such marvels. Friends and enemies are agreed thereupon.

Galt, who was brought into contact with the poet by chance, at the time of his first journey into Greece, and who travelled with him for several days, when remarking the beauty of Lord Byron's poems on Greece, says, "they possess the great and rare quality of being *as true with regard to nature and facts as they are sublime for poetic expression.*"

He quotes those beautiful lines with which the third canto of the 'Corsair' opens, wherein Lord Byron describes the lovely scenery that met his eye on ascending the Piræus;* and to the Cape Colonna, and to the so-called Tomb of Themistocles in the 'Giaour;' and Galt fancies he can remember by what circumstance and aspect of nature they were inspired.

Lord Byron did not admit the possibility of describing a site that had not been seen, a sentiment that had not been experienced, or at least well known on certain and direct testimony. Never could people say of him, what M. Sainte-Beuve asserted of Chateaubriand, namely, *that he had not visited the*

* "Slow sinks, more lovely ere his race be run,
* * * *
Not as in northern climes."
'Corsair,' canto iii.

places he described, that he lent to some what of right belonged only to others; and that he had not even seen Niagara.

On the contrary, when Lord Byron was writing, the objects described were really present, so to say, as facts rather than in imagination.

Mr. Galt was so persuaded of this that he almost denied him the possession of imagination, and he says that the stamp of personal experience is so strongly marked in many of Lord Byron's productions, usually considered fancies or inventions, that he deems it impossible not to assign for their basis real facts or events wherein he had been either actor or spectator.

To refuse Lord Byron imagination would be absurd; but it is true that his imagination could only have discovered the elements and materials so wonderfully put together, through a scrupulous and profound observation of reality. And it was only afterwards, that superadding sentiment and thought, he wrought out such splendid truths, which, if not precisely combined in the living reality, were so far superior that any absence in the original model appeared like a forgetfulness of nature.

Without, then, admitting Mr. Galt's ideas, in their extreme consequences, it is at least certain that Lord Byron's genius required so much to lean on truth in all things, that it may be said he owed far more to facts than to the power of imagination.

Apart from the faculty of combining, which he possessed in a splendid manner, if any one should take the trouble to observe, one by one, the characters he has painted, we should be still more confirmed in the above opinion. For instance, Conrad, that magni-

ficent type of the corsair, that energetic compound of an Albanese warrior and a naval officer, far from being an imaginary character, was entirely drawn from nature and real history. All who have travelled in the Levant, and especially at that period, must have met with personages whose appearance distinctly recalled Conrad.

That peaceful men, leading a regular monotonous life in the midst of civilized Europe, or persons who have only travelled over their maps or their books, quietly seated in their library—that they should find characters like Conrad's eccentric, and the incidents of such a career improbable, may easily be conceived; but it is not the less true that both are in perfect keeping with each other and with truth.

I might say the same thing of 'Childe Harold.' But having spoken of this character sufficiently elsewhere, in order to repel the unjust identification of the Pilgrim with the author,—for 'Childe Harold' appears to me the personification of a moral idea, of the accidental transitory state of a soul placed under certain circumstances, rather than a type,—I will only add here, that this unjust identification was also caused by that craving which Lord Byron experienced of leaning, in all things, on reality, on facts acquired through his own experience. For although it is incorrect to imagine that he made use of his looking-glass for drawing the portraits of his heroes, since the glass could not even for a passing moment—such as suffices only for a daguerreotype—have converted his gentle, beautiful expression of face into the dark countenance of a Harold, a Giaour, a Conrad, or a Lara; still it is true that he lent them some of his

own noble, fine lineaments, some faint shadow of his beauty, and that more than once he committed the fault of placing them in situations exactly similar to his own, even going so far as to instal his heroes within the ancient abbey of Newstead,—a hospitality that cost him dear.

Characters that had produced a strong impression on him easily became models for the personages portrayed in his poems. It was the terrible Ali Pasha of Yanina who furnished the most striking features depicted in the heroes of his Eastern poems. The reports current about Ali Pasha's uncle served to lend their share of truth; and we may say, in general, that those acquainted with Lord Byron and his history possessed the clue to his imaginary personages; they could even recognize his Adelinas, Dudus, Gulbeyazs, Angelinas, Myrrhas, Adahs; and having first taken his stand on earth, it cost his fancy very little to soar and idealize what might else have been too common-place.

As to the historical characters, we are certain of finding them in the most authentic histories; for it would be impossible to carry scrupulous research further than he did. Some observations on 'Marino Faliero,' his first historical drama, will suffice for an example.

The impression made on Lord Byron, when he arrived in Venice, by the character of this old man, and the terrible catastrophe that overtook him, first gave rise to his idea of the tragedy. But four years intervened between the project and its execution. During this time he consulted all the histories of Venice, every document and chronicle he could lay

his hands on. He passed long hours in the hall of the great council, opposite the gloomy black veil surmounted by that terrible inscription—"*Hic est locus Marino Faliero decapitati pro criminibus suis;*" on the Giants' staircase, where the Doge had been crowned ere he was degraded and beheaded; he had interrogated the stones forming the monuments raised to the Doges; often was he seen in the church of St. John and St. Paul, seeking out the tomb of Faliero and his family; and still he was not satisfied, for the motives of the conspiracy did not yet present themselves so clearly to his mind as the fact of the conspiracy itself. Then he wrote to Murray, to search him out in England other *more authentic* documents concerning this tragical end.

"I want it," he said to him in February, 1817, "and cannot find so good an account of that business here. . . . I have searched all their histories; but the policy of the old aristocracy made their writers silent on his motives, which were a private grievance against one of the patricians."

And not only did he seek for truth in books and monuments, but he likewise sought it in the character and manners of all classes inhabiting the lagoons. It was only towards the close of 1820, at Ravenna, that he felt ready to write his magnificent drama.

All the characters in this tragedy, except that admirable one of Angiolina, which he drew from imagination and traced with his heart, were supplied by history. In it Lord Byron has scrupulously respected places, epoch, and the time of duration for the action; points which he considered as elements of

truth in art; in short, all essential circumstances were faithfully reproduced in his drama.

Even the faults which critics little versed in psychological science, and obstinately forgetful that this work was *not intended for acting*, pretend to find in it, were but the necessary results of historical accuracy. These critics wished to meet with the love, jealousy, and other passions common to their age and country; but Lord Byron would only give them what he found in history. Thence, no love and no jealousy; but a proud, violent character, coming in collision with a Government proud and violent as itself; one of those men that are exceptional but real, in whom extremes of good and evil meet; one of those dramatic natures that fastened strongly on his imagination, producing a shock which kindled the flame of genius:—

"It is now four years that I have meditated this work, and, before I had sufficiently examined the records, I was rather disposed to have made it turn on a jealousy in Faliero. But perceiving no foundation for this in historical truth, and aware that jealousy is an exhausted passion in the drama, I have given it a more historical form."*

As to the motives for the conspiracy, the clearness of certainty only came to him a year after his drama had been published. But there was such an attraction between his mind and truth that his intuition had supplied the want of material certainty. And when a year afterwards, at Ravenna, he received the document so long desired, he was happy in sending Murray a copy of this document translated from an

* See Preface to Marino Faliero.

ancient chronicle by Sir Francis Palgrave, the learned author of the 'History of the Anglo-Saxons,' to be able to write :—

"Enclosed is the best account of the 'Doge Faliero,' which was only sent to me from an old MS. the other day. Get it translated, and append it as a note to the next edition. You will perhaps be pleased to see that my conceptions of his character were correct, though I regret not having met with this extract before. You will perceive that he himself said exactly what he is made to say about the Bishop of Treviso. You will also see that 'he spoke very little,' and these only words of rage and disdain, after his arrest, which is the case in the play, except when he breaks out at the close of Act V. But his speech to the Conspirators is better in the MS. than in the play. I wish that I had met with it in time."

The historical inaccuracies of authors, their carelessness about truth, whether the result of malice or inattention, revolted Lord Byron; and especially if such untruths tended to asperse a great character. The lies of Dr. Moore about the 'Doge Faliero' almost made him angry :—

"Where did Dr. Moore find that Marino Faliero begged his life? I have searched the chroniclers, and find nothing of the kind."

Lord Byron observes that this is not only historically, but also logically false :—

"His having shown a want of firmness," said Byron, "indeed, would be as contrary to his character as a soldier, to the age in which he lived, and at which he died, as it is to the truth of history. I know no justification, at any distance of time, for calumniating an historical

character: surely truth belongs to the dead, and to the unfortunate; and they who have died upon a scaffold have generally had faults enough of their own, without attributing to them those which the very incurring of the perils which conducted them to their violent death render, of all others, the most improbable."

We know his consideration and sympathy for Campbell, though Campbell had not always behaved well towards him. He forgave him many things, but he could not pardon the indifference this author often showed for *historical truth!*

At Ravenna he wrote in his journal, on the 10th of January, 1821:—

"Read Campbell's 'Poets.' Marked errors of Tom (the author) for correction. . . . Corrected Tom Campbell's 'slips of the pen;' a good work, though."

In his appendix to the first canto of 'Don Juan,' he says, "Being in the humour of criticism, I shall proceed, after having ventured upon the slips of Bacon, to wind up on one or two as trifling in the edition of the 'British Poets,' by the justly celebrated Campbell. But I do this in good will, and trust it will be so taken. If anything could add to my opinion of the talents and true feeling of that gentleman it would be his classical, honest, and triumphant defence of Pope against the vulgar cant of the day, as it exists in Grub Street.

"The inadvertencies to which I allude are . . ."

And after mentioning a few inadvertencies which are faults against justice and truth, he says:—

"A great poet quoting another should be correct: he should also be accurate when he accuses a Par-

nassian brother of that dangerous charge, 'borrowing:' a poet had better borrow anything (excepting money) than the thoughts of another—they are always sure to be reclaimed; but it is very hard, having been the lender, to be denounced as the debtor, as is the case of Anstey *versus* Smollett. As 'there is honour among thieves' let there be some amongst poets, and give each his due—none can afford to give it more than Mr. Campbell himself, who, with a high reputation for originality, and a fame which cannot be shaken, is the only poet of the times (except Rogers) who can be reproached (and in him it is indeed a reproach) with having written too little."

Hereupon he writes to Murray, half joking, half serious:—

"Murray, my dear, make my respects to Thomas Campbell, and tell him from me, with faith and friendship, three things that he must right in his 'Poets.' First, he says Anstey's 'Bath Guide' characters are taken from Smollett. 'Tis impossible: the 'Guide' was published in 1766, and 'Humphrey Clinker' in 1771—*dunque*, 'tis Smollett who has taken from Anstey. Secondly, he does not know to whom Cowper alludes, when he says there was one 'who built a church to God, and then blasphemed His name:' it was 'Deo erexit Voltaire' to whom that mad Calvinist and coddled poet alludes. Thirdly, he misquotes and spoils a passage from Shakespeare, —'to gild refined gold, to paint the lily,' &c.; for lily he puts rose, and bedevils in more words than one the whole quotation.

"Now, Tom is a fine fellow; but he should be correct: for the first is an injustice (to Anstey), the

second an *ignorance*, and the third a *blunder*. Tell him all this, and let him take it in good part: for I might have chastised him in a review and punished him; instead of which, I act like a Christian.

"Byron."

With regard to a quotation, or any circumstance intended to prove a truth, his love of *exactness* amounted to a *scruple*. He would have thought himself wanting in honour if he had made a false or an incomplete quotation. In one of the notes to 'Don Juan,' speaking of Voltaire, he had quoted those famous words:—"*Zaïre, vous pleurez;*" but being accustomed at that time to make great use of the familiar pronoun *thou*, as is the case in Italy, his quotation ran: "*Zaïre, tu pleures.*" But he hastened to write to Murray, "*Voltaire wrote: Zaïre, vous pleurez;* don't forget."

In his tragedy of 'Faliero,' Lord Byron had said that the Doges, Faliero's predecessors, were buried in the church of St. John and St. Paul; but he afterwards ascertained that it was only on the death of Andrea Dandolo, Faliero's predecessor, that the Council of Ten, by a sort of presentiment perhaps, decreed that the Doges should in future be buried with their families in their own church; previously they had all been interred in the church of St. Mark:—

". . . All that I said of his *ancestral Doges*, as buried at St. John's and Paul's, is a mistake, *they being interred in* St. Mark's. Make a note of this, by the *Editor*, to rectify the fact.

"In the notes to 'Marino Faliero,' it may be as well to say that '*Benintende*' was not really of

the *Ten*, but merely *Grand Chancellor*, a separate office (although important); it was an arbitrary alteration of mine.

"As I make such pretensions to accuracy, I should not like to be twitted even with such trifles on that score. Of the play they may say what they please, but not so of my costume and *dram. pers.*,—they having been real existences." *

"As to Sardanapalus," he writes to Murray "I thought of nothing but Asiatic history. The Venetian play, too, is rigidly historical. My object has been to dramatise, like the Greeks (a *modest* phrase), striking passages of history.

"All I ask is a preference for accuracy as relating to Italy and other places."

In books, monuments, and the fine arts, it was always *truth* that interested him. Except Sir Walter Scott's productions, he gave no place in his library to novels; other works of imagination, especially poetry, were excluded; two-thirds of his books were French works. His reading lay chiefly in history, biography, and politics.

Among the books Murray sent him were some travels: "Send me no more of them," he wrote, "I have travelled enough already; and, besides, *they lie*." †

Books with affected sentiment of any kind, imaginary itineraries, made him very impatient. High-sounding phrases jarred on his ears; and I thoroughly believe that the *forty centuries' looking down from the Pyramids upon the grand French army* somewhat *spoilt* his hero for him.

* Moore, Letter 391. † Letter 391.

What he especially sought for in monuments and among ruins was their authenticity. It was on this sole condition that he took interest in them.

Campbell, in his 'Lives of English Poets,' had averred that readers cared no more for the truth of the manners portrayed in Collins' 'Eclogues' than for the authenticity of the history of Troy:—

"'Tis false," says Lord Byron in his Memoranda, after having read Campbell; "we do care about 'the authenticity of the tale of Troy.' I have stood upon that plain daily, for more than a month, in 1810; and if anything diminished my pleasure, it was that the blackguard Bryant had impugned its veracity. It is true that I read 'Homer Travestied' (the first twelve books), because Hobhouse and others bored me with their learned localities, and I love quizzing. But I still venerated the grand original as the truth of history (in the material facts) and of place: otherwise, it would have given me no delight. Who will persuade me, when I reclined upon a mighty tomb, that it did not contain a hero? Its very magnitude proved this. Men do not labour over the ignoble and petty dead—and why should not the dead be Homer's dead? The secret of Tom Campbell's defence of inaccuracy in costume and description is, that his 'Gertrude,' &c., has no more locality in common with Pennsylvania than with Penmanmawr. It is notoriously full of grossly false scenery, as all Americans declare, though they praise parts of the poem. It is thus that self-love for ever creeps out, like a snake, to sting anything which happens, even accidentally, to stumble upon it."

In order, then, that Lord Byron might take an

interest in either a place, a monument, or a work of art, he must associate them in his mind with some fact which had really taken place. By what was he most impressed on reaching Venice ?—

"There is still in the Doge's Palace the black veil painted over Faliero's picture, and the staircase whereon he was first crowned Doge and subsequently decapitated. This was the thing that most struck my imagination in Venice—more than the Rialto, which I visited for the sake of Shylock: and more, too, than Schiller's 'Armenian,' a novel which took a great hold of me when a boy. It is also called the 'Ghost Seer,' and I never walked down St. Mark's by moonlight without thinking of it. And 'at nine o'clock he died.' But I hate things all fiction, and therefore the *Merchant* and *Othello* have no great attractions for me, but *Pierre* has. There should always be some foundation of fact for the most airy fabric, and pure invention is but the talent of a liar."

The little taste which he entertained for painting came from the impression that, of all the arts, it was the most artificial, and the least truthful. In April, 1817, he wrote to Murray as follows, on the subject:—

"Depend upon it, of all the arts it is the most artificial and unnatural, and that by which the folly of mankind is most imposed upon. I never yet saw the picture or the statue which came a league within my conception or expectation: but I have seen many mountains, and seas, and rivers, and views, and two or three women, who went as far beyond it."

But, then, what enthusiasm, whenever he did meet

with truth in art! When visiting the Manfrini Gallery at Venice, which is so rich in chefs-d'œuvre, he admits the charm of painting, and exclaims:—

"Amongst them there is a portrait of Ariosto by Titian, surpassing all my anticipation of the power of painting or human expression; it is the poetry of portrait and the portrait of poetry. Here was also a portrait of a lady of the olden times, celebrated for her talents, whose name I forget, but whose features must always be remembered. I never saw greater beauty, or sweetness, or wisdom: it is the kind of face to go mad about, because it cannot detach itself from its frame."

Our readers are aware with what obstinate determination the public voice proclaimed Lord Byron a sceptic, and still does. Nor will we here examine whether that epithet is merited, because a soul has been sometimes visited by the malady always more or less afflicting great minds; we will not ask if disquietude—which constitutes the dignity of our nature; if the torture caused by doubts and universal uncertainty, by the impossibility of explaining what is, or of comprehending what will be, if all this deserve to be called scepticism. It is not necessary to enter into the subject here, because we have already examined in another chapter * with what foundation such a name was applied to Lord Byron.

Now, we will content ourselves with adding that it was his love of truth and his delicacy of conscience which caused, in a great measure, what has been called his scepticism. For these sentiments would not allow him to affirm things that many others per-

* See chapter on 'Religion.'

haps affirm, without believing more in them. Moreover, he appears sometimes to have been *persuaded that doubt was the feeling least removed from truth.*

THIS QUALITY RISES TO A VIRTUE.

If Lord Byron's passion for truth had simply remained within the limits already described, it would have given earnest of a noble soul, more gifted than others, with instincts of a higher order; it would have lighted up his social character, given the charm of that frankness so delightful in his manners, conversation, style; so attractive in the expression of his fine countenance; but still it would only have been a natural quality, without any more right to the name of virtue than all the other beautiful instincts he had received from Heaven; but, when ceasing to be purely natural, it became a distinguishing characteristic of the author, then it went far beyond these limits. In his writings it raised him above all calculations of interest, made him despise all considerations of ambition or of ease, exposed him to terrible party warfare, to slander, and revenge; spurred him on to attack the great and powerful whenever they turned aside from the path of virtue, justice, or simplicity, and made him forget his nationality, that he might better remember his humanity.

Meanwhile he never once yielded to any interest; and thus this innate faculty, which might have been a virtue easily practised, *became one of heroic merit.*

We may safely assert that all his griefs through life owed their origin to this rare quality; for perhaps he did not know sufficiently how to reconcile it with a *certain amount* of that social virtue called prudence;

whose office it is to keep silence when advisable, and not to utter dangerous truths.

Certainly Lord Byron never showed that wisdom for himself which he knew well how to practise for others; witness his conduct in Greece, where, according to the account given by all who lived with him there at that time, he displayed the utmost prudence, moderation, and ability.*

That social virtue of prudence, which, to our mind, is somewhat akin to a defect, was wholly wanting in him in private life; yet it is a necessary virtue in his country, and especially was so in his day. England then was, in many respects, far from resembling the England of our time. Liberty of opinion was certainly guaranteed by law; but then there were

* M. Tricoupi, in his interesting 'History of the Greek Revolution,' ends his fine article upon Lord Byron, and upon his death, in the following words:—

"This man's great name, his noble struggle in the midst of misfortunes, the troubles which he had borne for the sake of Greece, the bright hopes which he was on the point of seeing realised, prove sufficiently what the Greeks lost in losing him, and the misfortune which his death was to them. Each one considered and mourned his loss as a private and as a public calamity. In ordering the funeral the governor of the town exclaimed, 'This time the beautiful Easter rejoicings have turned for us into hours of bitterness,' and he was right. All forgot Easter in presence of the blow which was dealt them by the loss of such a man.

"Byron, as a poet, was enthusiastic, but his enthusiasm, like his poetry, was deep; his policy in Greece was likewise intelligent and profound. No dreams like those formed by most of the lovers of the Greeks. No Utopian plans, democratic or anti-democratic. Even the press appeared to him as yet uncalled for. The independence of Greece, that was the essential point at issue, and to obtain this end he counselled the Greeks to be united amongst themselves and to respect foreign courts. His principal care was the organization of the army and the procuring of the funds necessary to maintain it. He loved glory, but only that which is solid. He refused to take the title of Commander-General of Continental Greece, which the government and the nation offered him in common accord. He hated politics as a rule, and avoided parliamentary discussions even in his own country. . . ."

the drawing-room tribunals; very unforgiving with regard to certain truths, and little disposed to admire that inclination which prompts superior minds not to conceal their real thoughts. The earth or the universe might have been conceded as a field open to criticism, he might express his true opinions on all points, provided only some few books, and one island, called England, were excepted. Under show of respect, absolute silence was required on these heads. They constituted the ark of alliance; to speak ill of them was not permissible, and even to praise was almost dangerous.

In the enchanted palace of 'Blue Beard,' one single chamber was reserved; and woe to him who penetrated therein.

Since then, a period of peace and prosperity, together with the effects of time and travel, have greatly improved the noble character of the English nation. In our day, pens, tongues, and consciences, are less strictly bound, and many truths may now be avowed without fear of bringing the flush of anger or of indignant modesty to the cheek.

The present, and, still less, the past, are no more considered as sacred ground. Even the Norman conquest is no longer a seditious subject. The dictionary of society has gained many words; and Englishmen no longer fear to see their children lose that patriotism which for them is almost a religion, because they read books not deifying their own country and full of libels on the rest of the globe.

Historians, novel-writers, poets—even theologians—have vied with each other in tearing away the bandages concealing many old wounds, in order to

cure them by contact with the vivifying breezes of heaven; and twenty years after Lord Byron, Macaulay has been able, without losing his popularity, to show less filial piety than he, and to blame the past in language so beautiful as to obtain forgiveness for the sacrifice even of truth.

But, in Lord Byron's time, England was carrying on her great struggle against the Lion of the age. Separated from the continent by war still more than by the sea, the cannon's roar booming across the waters added venom to her wounds, and pride made her prefer to conceal rather than to heal them.

The echo of this detested cannon was still sounding when Lord Byron returned to England, from his travels in the East, with the same thirst for truth as heretofore, but having gained much from observation, comparison, and reflection. He believed he had the right to make use of faculties with equal independence, whether as regarded his own nation or the rest of humanity. England then seemed to wish to arrogate to herself the monopoly of morality, wisdom, and greatness, together with the right of despising the rest of the world. Lord Byron considered this pretension as excessive, and he expressed his generous incredulity in lines proudly independent. He refused to see heroism where he did not believe it to exist, and would not accord glory to victories that seemed to him the result of chance. He refused to see virtue and religion in what he considered calculation or hypocrisy. He demanded *justice* for Catholic Ireland, and impartiality for enemies; he even went so far as to show sympathy for Napoleon and deplore

his fall. He could not allow party spirit to depreciate the genius of Napoleon. Madame de Staël, who had made Lord Byron's acquaintance in London when he was very young, and had conceived a great liking for him, often wrote to him, and always tried to prove that he was wrong in thinking so highly of Napoleon. But on account of this Lord Byron broke off the correspondence suddenly, which vexed Madame de Staël not a little. The invasion of France, the humiliation of a great nation, was painful to him; and this generous sentiment even caused him to commit a real *fault, which he expressed regret for more than once*, says Madame G——, when conversing with her at Pisa and Genoa. The fault was a certain feeling of hostility indulged towards the illustrious Duke of Wellington, whom he yet confessed to be the glory of his country.

"P.S. If you hear any news of battle or retreat on the part of the Allies (as they call them), pray send it. He has my best wishes to manure the fields of France with an invading army. I hate invaders of all countries, and have no patience with the cowardly cry of exultation over him at whose name you all turned whiter than the snow to which you are indebted for your triumph."

He was too generous an enemy to echo the Archbishop of Canterbury's prayer.*

As a Whig, he was indignant at the Prince of

* This strange prayer ran thus :—"O Lord Almighty, give us strength to destroy the last man of that perfidious nation (the French), which has sworn to devour alive thy faithful servants (the English)."

Wales's conduct in deserting his political banner and passing over to the Tories when he became Regent; so he wrote some hard verses against him,—'Lines to a Lady weeping,' addressed to the Princess Charlotte.

This poem was the olive-branch that Robert was about to snatch from the tomb. All evil passions were now let loose against Lord Byron.

The Tory party—so influential then, and which saw with displeasure the future promise of a great orator held out in the person of a young Whig peer—gladly seized a pretext for displaying its hostility. The higher clergy naturally clung to the interests of the aristocracy, as identical with their own: moreover, they were vexed with the young lord for attacking intolerancy, hypocrisy, and similar anti-Christian qualities, and consequently espoused with ardour Tory grievances. Pretending even to discover danger to religion in some philosophical verses,* they denounced the young poet as an *atheist* and a *rebel*. At the same time his admiration for foreign beauties wounded feminine self-love at home.

In thus placing the interests of truth above every other consideration, not only from the necessity he experienced of expressing it, but also with the design of serving justice, Lord Byron by no means ignored the formidable amount of burning coals he was piling upon his head. He knew well that the secret war going on against him delighted all his rivals, who, not having dared to show their spite at the time of his triumphs, had bided patiently the day of vengeance.

* Stanzas of second canto of 'Childe Harold.'

He was aware of it all, but did not therefore draw back; and looking fearlessly at the pile heaped with all these combustible materials intended for his martyrdom, he did not any the more cease from his work. He resisted, and accepted martyrdom like a *hero*.

"You can have no conception of the uproar the eight lines on the little Royalty's weeping in 1812 (now republished) have occasioned. . . . . The 'Morning Post,' 'Sun,' 'Herald,' 'Courier,' have all been in hysterics. . . . . I am an atheist, a rebel, and at last the devil (*boiteux*, I presume). My demonism seems to be a female's conjecture. . . . . The abuse against me in all directions is vehement, unceasing, loud." *

The editor, alarmed, proposed to have them disavowed.

"Take any course you please to vindicate yourself," Lord Byron answered him; "but leave me to fight my own way, and, as I before said, do not *compromise* me by anything which may look like *shrinking* on my part; as for your own, make the best of it. . . . . I have already done all in my power by the suppression" (of the satire). "If that is not enough, they must act as they please; but I will not 'teach my tongue a most inherent baseness,' come what may. . . . . I shall bear what I can, and what I cannot I shall resist. The worst they could do would be to exclude me from society. I have never courted it, nor, I may add, in the general sense of the word, enjoyed it; and there is a world elsewhere!

* Moore, Letter 162.

"Anything remarkably injurious I have the same means of repaying as other men, with such interest as circumstances may annex to it."

After this first great explosion, of which the verses addressed to the Princess Charlotte had formed the occasion and the pretext, the commotion appeared to subside. But the fire in the mine had not gone out. It still circulated obscurely, gathering strength in the quiet darkness. Another occasion was alone wanting for a second explosion, and a hand to strike the spark. The circumstance of his unhappy marriage, which had taken place in the interval, presented this occasion; and the hand to strike the spark was the one which had received the nuptial ring a year before. The explosion was brutal, abominable, insensate—unworthy of the society that tolerated it.

Then came another interval; the good who had been drawn into this stormy current were seized with regret and remorse. "*Why did we thus rise against our spoilt and favourite child?*" The wicked knew well wherefore they had done it, but the good did not. Macaulay told it them one day, twenty years afterwards, better than any one else has, in one of those passages where the beauty of his style, far from injuring truth, lends it a double charm, enhancing it just as nature's beauty is set off by a profusion of light.

This good feeling stealing over the public conscience alarmed Lord Byron's deadly enemies. They feared lest sentimental remorse should compromise their victory; and they manœuvred so well, that from that hour persecution took up permanent abode in

England, under pretext of offence to religion or morals. It followed him on his heroic journey into Greece, and ceased not with his death. Even after that, the vengeance and rage of his enemies—the indiscretion and timidity of friends—the material or moral speculations of all, together with the assurance of impunity —continued to feed the fire which an end so glorious as his ought to have quenched.*

But if the war against him did not cease, his perseverance and courage in saying what he thought did not cease either. Who more than he despised popularity and literary success, if they were to be purchased at the cost of truth?

"Were I alone against the world," said he, "I

* The system of depreciating Byron's acts never once ceased. It followed him to Greece and even to the tomb. Count Gamba, his friend and companion, in speaking of the excellent health enjoyed by all during the passage from Genoa to Greece, says:—

"We were in excellent health and spirits during our whole voyage from Italy to Greece, and for this we were partly indebted to our medical man, and partly to that temperance which was observed by every one on board, except at the beginning of the voyage by the captain of our vessel, who, however, ended by adopting our mode of life. I mention this to contradict an idle story told in a magazine ('The London') 'that Lord Byron on this voyage passed the principal part of the day drinking with the captain of the ship.' Lord Byron, as we all did, passed his time chiefly reading. He dined alone on deck; and sometimes in the evening he sat down with us to a glass or two, not more, of light Asti wine. He amused himself in jesting occasionally with the captain, whom he ended, however, by inspiring with a love of reading, such as he thought he had never felt before."

But his enemies were not discouraged. When they saw that Byron landed in one of the Ionian Islands, which was a far wiser and more prudent course to adopt, and one which might prove infinitely more beneficial to Greece than going straight to the Morea, they spread the report that instead of going to Greece, he spent his life in debauchery and in the continuation of his poem of 'Don Juan,' at rest in a lovely villa situated on one of the islands. Moore informed him rather abruptly of this report, which distressed him greatly.

would not exchange my freedom of thought for a throne." And again: "He who wishes not to be a despot, or a slave, may speak freely."

That such independence of mind, aided by such high genius, should have alarmed certain coteries—not to speak of certain political and religious sets, who were all powerful—may easily be conceived. We cannot feel surprise at the scandals they got up in defence of their privileges, when attacked by a new power who made every species of baseness and hypocrisy tremble; nor can we wonder that, unknowing where it would stop, they should have sought to cast discredit on the oracle by slandering the man. That the bark bearing him to exile should have been pushed on by a wind of angry passions in coalition—by a breeze not winged by conscience—may also be conceived; but to *conceive* is not to absolve, and in using the above expression we only mean to allow due share to human nature in general—to the character, manners, and perhaps to the special requirements of England. And if we ought not to condone party spirit in politics, defending privileges to the death; nor the anti-Christian ferocity displayed by that portion of the clergy who, without reason or sincerity, attacked him from the pulpit; nor yet the malice and revenge displayed in the vile slanders that pursued him to his last hour; we can, on the other hand, comprehend and even, up to a certain point, excuse this prosperous and noble country of England for not classing her great son among popular poets—for hiding her admiration cautiously: since it must be acknowledged that Lord Byron often acted and

wrote rather as *belonging to humanity, than merely as belonging to England.*

But if he were treated with the same injustice by foreigners, could the same excuse be made for them? Would a man be excusable if laziness and carelessness made him accept, without examination, some type set up for Lord Byron by a country wounded in her self-love, as England had been, or the reserves made by hostile biographers, under the weighty influence of a society organised as English society then was? The vile system which consists in seeking to give a good opinion of one's own morality by being severe on the morality of others, is only too well known. Would it be excusable to apply it ruthlessly to Lord Byron?—to pretend to repeat that in attacking prejudice he wounded morals?—that he injured virtue by warring against hypocrisy?—that by using a right inherent to the human mind in some hypothetical lines of a poem, written at twenty-one years of age, and which is beyond the comprehension of the multitude, since the greater number of mankind neither read elevated poetry nor works of high taste; is it not absurd to pretend that he wished to upset them in their religious belief, and deprive them of truths which are at once their consolation, support and refuge in time of sorrow and suffering?

Nevertheless, *Frenchmen* have spoken thus; and in this way, through these united causes, Lord Byron has remained *unappreciated* as a man and unfairly judged as a poet.

One calls him *the poet of evil;* another *the bard of sorrow.* But no! Lord Byron was not exclusively

either one or the other. He was *the poet of the soul*, just as Shakespeare was before him.

Lord Byron, in writing, never had in view virtue rather than vice. To take his stand as a teacher of humanity, at his age, would have seemed ridiculous to him. After having chosen subjects in harmony with his genius, and a point of view favourable to his poetic temperament, which especially required to throw off the yoke of artificial passions and of weak, frivolous sentiments, what he really endeavoured was to be powerfully and energetically true. He thought that truth *ought* always to have precedence over everything else—that it was the source of the *beautiful* in art, as well as of all *good* in souls. To him lies were *evil* and *vice;* truth was *good* and *virtue.* As a poet, then, he was the bard of the soul and of truth; and as a man, all those who knew him, and all who read his works, must proclaim him the poet who has come nearest to the ideal of truth and sincerity.

And now, after having studied this great soul under every aspect, if there were in happy England men who should esteem themselves higher in the scale of virtue than Lord Byron, because having never been troubled in their belief, either through circumstances or the nature of their own mind, they *never admitted or expressed any doubt;* because they are the happy husbands of those charming, indulgent, admirable women to be found in England, who *love and forgive so much;* because, being rich, they have not refused *some trifle* out of their superfluity to the poor; because, proud and happy in privileges bestowed by their constitution, they have never *blamed those in power:* if

these prosperous ones deemed themselves superior to their great fellow-citizen, would it be illiberal in them to express now a different opinion? Might we not without rashness affirm, that they should rather hold themselves honoured in the virtue and glory of their illustrious countryman, humbly acknowledging that their own greater happiness is not the work of their own hands?

REFLECTIONS

UPON MR. DISRAELI'S NOVEL

'VENETIA.'

A SEMI-BIOGRAPHY OF LORD BYRON.

Is Mr. Disraeli to be classed among the biographers of Lord Byron because in his preface to 'Venetia' he declares that his object is to portray Lord Byron? We do not think so. Truth and error, romance and history, are too much intermixed, and the author himself confesses this fact in calling his work a novel. But whilst denying to 'Venetia' the right of being styled a biography, we must admit that it is both a deep, true, and at times admirable study of the fine and so ill-judged character of Lord Byron. The extraordinary qualities with which he was gifted, both in heart and in mind, his genius, his amiability, his irresistible attractions, his almost supernatural beauty, are all set forth with consummate ability, and the greatest penetration. He has made all his other characters, which are for the most part imaginary, subservient to this end; and he has created some (such as Lady Annabel) which moralists will not easily admit to be possible, it being granted that all the characters in the book are mentally sane. It is questionable whether the virtues and qualities which adorn Lady Annabel are compatible with the defects of her nature. Mr. Disraeli has acted in the same way as regards the circumstances of Byron's life; he

has heaped them together without any regard to what may or may not be true in their supposed occurrence, some of them being founded on reality and others not so.

He has given Byron two individualities. Lord Cadurcis represents Byron from his infancy to the time of his marriage, and Mr. Herbert equally represents Lord Byron from that fatal epoch till his death. The selection of two persons to represent one same character and to allow of Byron's simple yet complex nature being better understood was a very happy philosophical notion.

He portrays Lord Byron as he was, or as he would have been in the given circumstances; and he pictures the others as they should or might have been, not as they were. In reading 'Venetia' it is impossible not to like Lord Cadurcis, and to admire him, just as all those who knew Lord Byron loved and esteemed him; or not to respect Mr. Herbert, whom he styles "the best and greatest of men," as he would have been revered had Byron reached a greater age. He depicts Byron at every epoch of his life, and as circumstances develop his latent predispositions.

He first shows him to us as the innocent child, whose heart is full of tenderness, meekness, sensibility, and docility, such as his tutor, Dr. Drury, said he was: "rather easier to be led with a silken string than with a cable;" who is gifted with a noble and proud nature, which is easily moved; who possesses a great sense of justice and an undaunted courage; who scorns excuse and cares not to lessen his fault. He then shows him as the thoughtful boy, both when alone and with others; and as the gayest and wildest of

creatures when in the company of the beloved companion of his childish sports; a boy full of kindness and of the desire to please; whose absence is ever a subject of regret, so great is the love he inspires, both in his masters and in his servants, and indeed in all who come near him. At his early age can already be traced the germs of those qualities which foretell that brilliant mind which is to win some day the heart of a nation, and dazzle the fancy of a world of admirers. The sight of the fair hair and of the angelic beauty of the little Venetia is enough to dry his tears; and herein we not only perceive already the extreme impressionable disposition of his nature, but also the power and influence which beauty is destined to exercise over him. The love of solitude and meditation is already traceable in the child. He loves to wander at night among the dark and solitary cloisters of his Abbey; he loves to listen to the whistling of the wind re-echoed by the cloisters; he delights in the murmurs of the waters of his lake when the winter storms disturb their serenity, and uproot the strongest oaks of his park. Proud of his race, his whole nature sympathises with the glorious deeds of his ancestors, and one feels that he would fain rather die than show himself unworthy of them.

One sees the germs of poetry sown in his mind—but one feels that the heart alone can make them fructify, and give them an outward form. Nothing is more touching than the tenderness which he feels and inspires wherever he goes.

Mr. Disraeli then shows him in his youth, just at the time when he is to leave college for the University, and presents him to the reader as a remarkably

well-educated young man, in whom the best principles have been inculcated, and whose conduct and conversation bear evidence of a pure, generous, and energetic soul "that has acquired at a very early age much of the mature and fixed character of manhood without losing anything of that boyish sincerity and simplicity that are too often the penalty of experience.

"He was indeed sincerely religious, and as he knelt in the old chapel that had been the hallowed scene of his boyish devotions, he offered his ardent thanksgivings to his Creator who had mercifully kept his soul pure and true, and allowed him, after so long an estrangement from the sweet spot of his childhood, once more to mingle his supplications with his kind and virtuous friends."

"He is what I always hoped he would be," says Lady Annabel. "Remember what a change his life had to endure; few, after such an interval, would have returned with feelings so kind and so pure. I always fancied that I observed in him the seeds of great virtues and great talents, but I was not so sanguine that they would have flourished as they appear to have done."

Young as he is, he is already accustomed to reflect; and the result of his dreams is a desire to live away from the world with those he loves. The world as seen by others has no attraction for him. What the world covets appears to him paltry and faint. He sympathises with great deeds, but not with a boisterous existence. He cares not for that which is ordinary. He loves what is rare and out of the common way. He dwells upon the deeds of his ancestors in Palestine and in France, who have left a memorable name in

the annals of their country. Cadurcis experiences inwardly a desire, and even the power to imitate their example. He feels that to become the world's wonder no sacrifice is great enough; but in this age of mechanism, what career is left to a chivalrous spirit like his? He then longs for the happiness of private life in the company of so perfect a creature as Venetia; but he is still so young, and Venetia, who loves him like a brother and a friend, cannot as yet understand the nature of another kind of love. He then leaves for the University, with grief implanted at the bottom of his heart. Disraeli then shows how, after three years, during which time his genius had been smouldering as it were, it at last appeared in a splendour quite unrivalled and unexampled, like a star equally strange and brilliant, which scarcely has it become visible in the horizon, than it already reaches its zenith. Not only is he distinguished by his writings, but by a thousand other ways, which fill the heart and dazzle the eyes. Where everything is remarkable he is most noticed; and the most conspicuous where all is brilliant. He is envied by men, praised and sought after by women, admired by all. His life has become a perpetual triumph, a splendid act, which is enthusiastically applauded, and in which he ever plays the best and most heroic part. In the midst of this infatuation of a whole nation, among those handsome and noble women who forget themselves too much since they forget themselves entirely for the honour of a look from him, why is he not happy? What is he craving for? What is his occupation? Why, when envied by all, is he yet to be pitied?

It is that his life is still, and will ever be, the life of the heart which finds no satisfaction to its desire in the midst of the world wherein it is doomed to live.

On one occasion he finds himself at the house of the most fashionable woman in London, of the great and beautiful person whose love for him is greater than he would wish. Many people are assembled there; dinner is about to be announced. No one but himself attracts attention or calls for enthusiastic eulogies; yet he is sad, absent, wearied. By his proud, handsome looks, his reserve, and his melancholy attitude, he might be taken for an unearthly being, condemned, as a punishment, to visit our terrestrial orb. All of a sudden his melancholy gives way to the liveliest animation; his cheeks glow, and happiness beams in his beautiful eyes. What has happened? Among the guests arriving he has heard the servant call out the name of his old tutor at Cherbury, the friend of all the friends of his youth. Raised to the dignity of a bishop, the late tutor has arrived in London to take his seat in the House of Lords. Again to see this friend of his youth, who is likely to speak to him of Cherbury, which he loved so dearly, and of Venetia, is a pleasure which his triumphs have never afforded him; and from that moment all is changed in his eyes, everything is smiling, everything is bright.

He learns that Lady Annabel and Venetia have left their retreat of Cherbury and have arrived in London. Cadurcis has but one thought, one aspiration, that of seeing them again. He does see Venetia again, and he feels that the world's praises are no longer anything to him, except to be placed at her

feet, and that he would give up all the idolatry of which he is the object for one year of happiness spent at Cherbury. When Venetia sees her ideal realised, and that Lord Cadurcis unites in him all the qualities of her dear Plantagenet with those brilliant and imposing talents which command love and admiration; when she beholds in him the genius of her father linked with the heart of her earliest friend, to whom she is still so deeply attached; when she sees her dear Plantagenet "courted, considered, crowned, incensed—in fact, a great man" living in an atmosphere of glory and in the midst of the applause of his cotemporaries, Venetia exchanges her fraternal love, which was so touching, for the most ardent passion which one perfect creature can inspire in one as perfect as itself.

But the obstacle to their happiness now arises, and Lady Annabel it is who becomes metamorphosed into a woman whose judgment is false, whose prejudices are great, whose principles are inexorable; who knows nothing of the world, nothing of her own heart nor of the human heart; who judges all things by certain arbitrary rules, and acts sternly in accordance with her inexplicable judgment. All the love which she would have had for Plantagenet at Cherbury is turned into hatred on learning that he has become a great poet, the admiration of his country, the observed of all observers; that all the world is anxious to see him, that the finest ladies sigh for one of his looks, that he is not insensible to their admiration, that he is a Whig, and not only a Whig, but very nearly a rebel. She reads his poems, and her astonishment is only surpassed by the horror with

which they inspire her. She sees Herbert in Cadurcis, and unable as she was to understand the former, so is she unequal to the task of comprehending Cadurcis. An imaginative being makes her tremble; such a creature can only be a monster. The praises bestowed upon Cadurcis do not shake her prejudices. His cousin, a brave sailor—a Tory, whose nature is as noble as it is frank and loyal—in vain tells her that Cadurcis is one of the most generous, most amiable, and most praiseworthy of men. In vain does he assure her that notwithstanding the difference of their political opinions, he can scarcely give her an idea of the delicacy and unbounded goodness which he has shown—that his heart is perfect, that his intellect is the finest that ever existed, and that if his conduct has at times been a little irregular, allowances must be made for the temptations which assailed him at the age of twenty-one, the sole master of his acts, and with all London at his feet. "It is too much for any one's head; but say or think what the world may, I know there is not a finer creature in existence. Venetia, who feels the truth of all this, inwardly exclaims, 'Dear, dear Cadurcis, can one be surprised at your being beloved when you are so generous, so amiable, so noble, so affectionate!' But the poor child in vain recalls to her mother the conduct of Plantagenet, who displays constancy in his true affections. 'No,' exclaims Lady Annabel, 'minds like his have no heart, a different impulse directs their existence—I mean imagination.'"

Lady Annabel tortures her daughter, to extort from her the promise that she will never marry Lord Cadurcis. Her devotion for that daughter, which

seemed to be the essence of her life, is no longer in this hard-hearted woman but a form of her egotism; and Venetia, vexed in all her natural sentiments, instead of being the idol of her affections, becomes in reality the martyr of her pride.

After dwelling upon the agony of mind experienced by these two beautiful and loving souls, both victims of Lady Annabel's cruelty, Disraeli shows us Cadurcis a prey to despair; enduring the consequences of the fashionable life which he is compelled to lead, that is, of the dissipated existence which he wades through against his will; the victim, besides, of the jealous and fanatical love of the great lady whose yoke he had not been able as yet to shake off. A duel between him and the lady's husband is the result, and nothing is more admirable than the picture of Lord Byron (or Lord Cadurcis) in all the scenes which precede and follow this duel; his calmness, his courage, the mixture of humour and wit with which he ever was wont to meet the greatest perils, and which was one of the characteristics of his nature, and, above all, that great and noble generosity of which he gave so many proofs in every circumstance and at every period of his life. Then follow the consequences of the duel, and the capital derived from it by the accumulated stupidity and revenge of those inferior persons jealous of his superiority and of his popular fame.

Nothing is so beautiful, however, as the scene which takes place first at the club and then at the House of Lords, where Mr. Disraeli shows this noble and calumniated creature the object of the base and hypocritical jealousy of most of his colleagues, who,

notwithstanding their hatred for him, were wont to call themselves his friends; when, exhausted and almost the victim of a ferocious hatred of an excited populace, he stands calm in the midst of these truly English elements in the attitude of an archangel or of a demi-god, opposing them and maintaining his ground until with the aid of a few brave and faithful friends, of the constable's truncheon, and the arrival of the mounted guard, he succeeds in getting rid of them altogether. All this, although not quite true, either as an historical fact or in its details, is, however, so admirably told, that it may be taken as a document well worthy of consideration by the biographer, and of which extracts cannot be given without spoiling the whole.

In the midst of the turmoil occasioned by this duel, in which his adversary had been seriously wounded, Cadurcis suddenly finds himself abandoned by those who called themselves his friends, calumniated by the press, who spare no falsehoods to disparage his character, but whose contradictions have no effect in his great successes. Cadurcis, gifted as he is with an extreme sensibility, and accustomed to live in an atmosphere of praise, finds himself suddenly nailed to the pillory of public indignation, sees his writings, his habits, his character, and his person, equally censured, ridiculed, and blemished; in fact, he finds himself the victim of reaction, and yet all this does not affect his mind; his true agony is caused not by the regret at losing his prestige and his popularity, nor by the conduct of those who style themselves his friends, and who now joined his enemies in spreading and believing in the false reports respecting him.

His greatness of soul and the purity of his conscience alike help him to endure these misfortunes; but what really does give him pain, is the thought that all these absurd rumours will reach the ears of Venetia. He has lost all hope of obtaining her hand, but he feels the want of her esteem. He wishes her to judge him as he deserves to be judged; and the thought that she likewise may put faith in the infamous and stupid reports which are spread about him, throws him into despair. When his cousin announces to him that he has succeeded in making the truth known to Venetia, how consoled he feels, and how grateful is he to his cousin! To his credit, the cousin did actually, in presence of Lady Annabel, who remained incredulous, endeavour to re-establish facts in their true light; and despite her sullen mood, did he courageously undertake the defence of Cadurcis, accuse the Mounteagles and the world in general, and conclude by declaring that "Cadurcis was the best creature that ever existed, the most unfortunate, the most ill-treated; and that if one should be liable to be pursued for such an affair, over which Cadurcis could have no control, there was not a man in London who could be sheltered from it for ten minutes." When Lord Cadurcis receives Venetia's message, which is to tell him that he remains for her what he has ever been, the announcement acts upon him as a charm, brings calm back to his mind, and renders him indifferent for the future to the opinion of the world. The experience of that day has entirely cured him of his former deference for the opinion of society. The world has outraged him. He no longer owes anything to the world.

His reception in the House of Lords, and the riot outside the House, have severed his ties with all classes, from the highest to the lowest; his grateful heart will ever preserve the remembrance of those who have shown him true affection by displaying moral courage in his defence. But they are few,—some relations, or nearly such by their association with them, and for these his gratitude and his respect are unlimited; but as for the others, he will pay them back by showing them his contempt, by publishing the truth respecting them, their country, their habits, their laws, their customs, their opinions, in order that they may be known and judged by the whole world,—a tribunal far more enlightened than the limited one of his native isle. Henceforth he resolves never again to meet the advances of those civilised "ruffians" who affect to be sociable. He prepares to leave England, with the intention never again to return to it. He shuts himself up in his room for a week, and allowing free scope to his passionate and wounded soul, he writes his adieu to England, and in the task his mind finds relief. In this poem, wherein a few well-merited sarcasms find a place, and wherein there are many allusions to Venetia, there are passages so delicate, so tender, so irresistibly pathetic, that it exercised an extraordinary influence upon public opinion. Again the tide of public sympathy runs high in his favour; it is found that Cadurcis is the most calumniated of mortals, that he is more interesting than ever; and Lady Mounteagle is spoken of as she deserves. Cadurcis is, however, too proud to accept new sympathies likely to make him suffer all that he has already

suffered. He quits his native land, surrounded by a halo of glory, but with contempt on his part for that popular favour of which he has too cruelly experienced the worth. He sails for Greece, and here Disraeli shows how he led a life of study, and finally depicts him, under the name of Herbert, as a philosopher and a virtuous man, who, after behaving as a hero, and after abandoning some of the illusions of youth, and principally that of making men wiser and better, aspires only at leading a mild, regular, virtuous, and philosophical existence.

Notwithstanding the great charm of Mr. Disraeli's book, to give extracts from which would only be to spoil it, it must, however, be allowed that the real and the imaginary are too much intermingled. All the fictions of time and place, which only leave the sentiments of the real man untouched, all the double and treble characters which at times quit, and at others resume, their individuality almost as in a dream, tend to create a confusion which is prejudicial to truth. Thus, Lady Annabel has charms and qualities wholly incompatible with her supposed stern severity. Miss Venetia, a perfect emanation of love and beauty, is at times transformed into an imaginary Miss Chaworth, and at others into a beloved sister, and at others again into an adorable Ada——; Lady Mounteagle is sometimes too like, and often too unlike, the real Lady C. L——; the whole is confused, fatiguing to the mind, and too fictitious not to be regretted, since the express intention of the author is to paint an historical character, acting in the midst of circumstances generally founded on reality.

In following out the intention of the author, and

his want of respect for truth, it is impossible not to ask ourselves why, whilst respecting circumstances of such slight import as the preservation of the Christian names of the mother and wife, he has not done the same for more important accidents in the hero's life? Why, for instance, have described his childhood as a painful time? Was not Lord Byron surrounded with the tenderest cares whilst in Scotland? Had he been unhappy there, would he have transmitted to us in such happy lines his remembrance of the time which he spent in the North? Is it not in Scotland that his heart was nursed with every affection, that his mind drank in the essence of poetry? Why make his mother die when he was only twelve years of age, since she died only on his return from Spain and from Greece, that is when he was twenty-two? Why make her die of grief at being abandoned by him, in consequence of an imaginary scene which obliges her to take refuge in the midst of a band of Bohemian travellers, when it is known that she died rather by the excess of joy which she experienced at the thought of seeing him again after an absence of nearly two years? Why change the ages, and give Miss Chaworth fifteen when she was eighteen, or himself eighteen when he was fifteen? Why give him such an affectionate guardian instead of Lord Carlisle? It may be argued that in these changes in the actual life of Lord Byron, we must only perceive the genius of the writer, who by making the hero's infancy a sad one, and causing the first glimpse of happiness to dawn upon him at Cherbury, in depriving him of his mother at an early age in order that he may live entirely in the Herbert family, where he

finds so much happiness, and repays it so well, Mr. Disraeli believed that he could bring out in better relief all the tenderness, kindness, docility, gratitude, constancy, and those other rare and splendid qualities of his hero's young soul. In reducing Miss Herbert's years, and in increasing those of his hero, the author no doubt wished to render forcible the sentiments which a child of fifteen could not otherwise have inspired in a young girl of eighteen. The imaginary duel was probably conceived to afford the author an opportunity of showing his hero under other admirable aspects, and especially to furnish him with the means of casting blame upon English society, of absolving him, and of showing how he was the victim of inherent national prejudices, which time has not yet succeeded in eradicating.

The exuberance and variety of the gifts which nature had bestowed upon Byron, together with the universality of his genius, which created in him such apparently singular contrasts, no doubt inspired Mr. Disraeli with the idea that to make him better known it was necessary to make two persons of one, each of a different age, so as to be able to divide his qualities according to their suitableness to those ages, and to make him act and speak in accordance with each given character: to show us the man in his moral, social, and intellectual capacity during his transition from early youth to a maturer age, after the experience of those hardships of life which have purified and strengthened his soul. The first period is represented by the ardent and passionate Lord Cadurcis, the other by the wise and philosophical Herbert. In making Herbert live to a mature age,

and in centering in him every grace, every quality, every perfection with which a mortal can be gifted, he wished to show to what degree of moral perfection Lord Byron might have attained, and how happy he might have been in the peace and quiet of domestic life had he been joined to another wife in matrimony, since notwithstanding Lady Annabel's faults, happiness was not out of Herbert's reach. The conclusion to which Disraeli no doubt points is the inward avowal by Lady Annabel herself that she, not Herbert, was the cause of their separation, and of their useless misfortunes. Again, when young Lord Cadurcis returns from Greece, and when Disraeli recounts his conversation with Herbert, his intention, no doubt, was to show us the intellectual and moral progress which time has caused him to make,—the transition from the 'Childe Harold' of twenty-one to the 'Childe Harold' of 'Manfred' of twenty-nine; and from the 'Childe Harold' of thirty to the 'Don Juan' and 'Sardanapalus' of thirty-three; he thus was able to put in relief that mobility of character which existed in him as regards a certain order of ideas, and which blended itself so well with the depth and the constancy of other of his views, enabling us to penetrate into the recesses of that beautiful soul, and displaying to our admiring gaze its numberless springs of action,—at times his constant aspiration to come to the aid of humanity, and his little hope of succeeding in modifying our corrupt nature; his love of glory, and how little he cared for the appreciation of the public of which he had experienced the fickle favours; his knowledge of life, his simple tastes, his love of

nature, and the greatness of his mind, of which no ambition or worldly feeling could tarnish the simplicity and even sublimity. In giving him two individualities the novelist was better able to combine the passionate sarcasms of Cadurcis with the smiles of goodness and tolerance of Herbert, and to show him to us as he was wont to converse, mixing the wittiest remarks with the most serious reflections. He has made him express a number of opinions apparently contradictory, but which belonged to his peculiar character, which was equally simple and complex, alike sensible and passionate, subject to a thousand influences of weather and seasons; and though inflexible in his principles of honour as in the whole course of his existence, yet changeable in things of minor importance. He loves to mystify, and writes, without reflecting as to the possible consequences, a number of things which cross his mind, and in which he does not believe, but of which his love of humour forces the expression to his lips. Again, Disraeli tells us of a number of his real ideas, initiates us into his literary tastes, his philosophical views, his preferences, his admiration for the great men of antiquity and of modern times; tells us why his favourite philosophers are Plato and Epicurus, his favourite characters in antiquity Alexander and Alcibiades, both young and handsome conquerors; in modern times Milton and Sir Philip Sydney, Bayle, and Montaigne; what his opinions respecting Shakespeare and Pope, what Cadurcis, and what Herbert thinks of these; and finally he gives us his views upon the love which we should have for truth, upon

the influence which political situations bear upon the grandeur of country, not only in literature and in arts, but likewise in philosophy, and in a number of other ways.

All these means employed by the great novelist certainly succeed in making of 'Venetia' a most delightful book; but notwithstanding its charms, as we read, it is impossible not to ask oneself at times whether an historical novel is thus entitled to encroach upon the biography of great men. Without pretending to settle the question, I own that I rather appreciate the truth of an historical work than all the pleasure which the talent of an author can afford me, and it appears to me that if Mr. Disraeli, with his admirable talent, had chosen to write the life of Lord Byron, he would have done better. We should not, it is true, have had in the biography either the pleasant life at Cherbury, or the scene at Newstead; neither the duel nor its consequences; but we should have had almost a similar Lady Mounteagle, and we should have seen the rise of that same base spirit in his colleague which greeted him at one period of his life: the same wickedness which assailed him, the same jealousy with which he was looked upon, the same cruel persecution to which he was subjected, the same hatred which assailed him on the part of the people who had a little before so idolised him: and in short, the same reaction in the public mind which actually took place. We should, on the other hand, have equally seen the same noble mind, too proud again to submit to the curb under the yoke of popular public feeling. He would not have shown us a charming

Lady Annabel styled a virtuous woman, though she abandons her husband simply because she believes he no longer entertains for her all the ardent love which he had evinced during the honeymoon!—a Lady Annabel, indeed, who constitutes in herself a being morally impossible, who though she does abandon her husband, spends her night in bewailing his loss at the foot of his portrait; who, though she adores her daughter, nearly causes her death with grief from the fear which she has that the child will not marry a man of genius like her father. Instead of such a woman we should have had, if not one more logical in her acts, at least more real and historical, and exemplifying the painful and murderous effects of silence in the condemnation of a man against whom the venom of calumny has been directed—that man being no less a person than her own husband. Instead of a Lady Annabel repentant at last, and self-accusing, truth and reality would have presented us with an insensible, hardhearted, and inexorable woman, who remains inflexible to the last, and who deserves that the effects should be applied to her of the words which Cadurcis, in a moment of despair, pronounces against Venetia's mother, when the former declares that she is the victim of her mother, but that nevertheless she will do her duty:

"Then my curse upon your mother's head! May Heaven rain all its plagues upon her! The Hecate!"

We should not have had a Venetia who is truly a delicious emanation from a poet's mind, and the only woman worthy of becoming the wife of Lord Byron, who sums up in herself all the tenderness which he

must have inspired in or felt for a woman, a sister, and a daughter. But we should have had, instead of her, three persons who really existed, and who exercised a great influence over Lord Byron's life. The one, a young lady of eighteen, whom Lord Byron styled light and coquettish, but who really possessed his heart at fifteen years of age. The other his dear Augusta, who was truly a Venetia towards him. And finally, his beloved little Ada, for whom he had such a paternal tenderness. Instead of an elderly Herbert returning to domestic happiness, which would simply have been impossible with the wife whom Fate had chosen for Lord Byron, we should have had a handsome young man who has not waited until he had reached the mature age of Herbert to be adorned with every virtue, in whom reason is not the effect of growing years, whose wisdom is not that of the old; and instead of the pathetic catastrophe which is attributed to Herbert and Cadurcis together, and which really occurred to Shelley, we should have had Lord Byron's real death, which was infinitely more pathetic, and could have been described in equally beautiful and heartrending language. How sublime would have been the history of the death of that young man who at the age of thirty-four heroically sacrifices his life for the independence of a country which is not his own, and whose patriotism is greater than that of his countrymen, since he prefers the cause of humanity to the interests of the little spot on the globe where he was born.

If, then, instead of a novel, Mr. Disraeli had given us a true history, the work would have been an

everlasting monument erected to the memory of two noble beings, and would have been transmitted to posterity as a valuable testimony of the virtues of Lord Byron.

As the book stands, and written by such a man as Mr. Disraeli, it will ever remain a study worthy of being quoted among those whose object it is to proclaim the truth respecting Lord Byron.

Paris, November, 1868.

THE END.

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Guiccioli, Teresa (Gamba)
contessa, afterwards Boissy
My recollections of Lord
Byron

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